The WRONG WAY

ROBERT ELLIOTT

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THE WRONG WAY

A Story

By

ROBERT ELLIOTT

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(October)

THE WRONG WAY

I

GRACE LARCH was standing at one of the front windows, one hand holding back the lace curtain. She was looking at the limited scene stretched before her—a wide, ill-kept country street.

The houses on either side of the way were unpretentious frame structures with considerable space laid out in gardens. There were no railings nor gates, so the general effect was rather pleasing. Great elms bordered the sidewalks and surrounded the houses. These fine, old trees were now gorgeous under the caress of autumn, and their brilliant colors glorified the unpretentious houses, and the wide, ill-kept street.

The room in which she stood was one of those shabby-genteel parlors so often seen in the homes of every-day, average people. The floor was covered with a worn moquette carpet, which perhaps had once been rich and pretty. Here and there were spread ugly imitation Turkish rugs, a plain attempt at the artistic and the useful, for they concealed patches and darns that might have given offense. Easy chairs hung with scented bags and embroidered draperies filled the space. In one corner was a wide lounge covered with cretonne and a mass of pillows; in another an upright piano; in the third, a cheap easel, ebonized by Cecily Larch, upon which rested a bad copy of

Millet's "L' Angelus"—of course. The walls were hung with plaques of impossible pansies, sunflowers heavily framed in dark-colored velvets, and a large study of pink roses on a glaring background of blue; innumerable photographs of smiling girls and babies; sprays of autumn leaves; cotillion favors; ribbons; banners; and odds and ends of every description.

The two front windows and the bay window at the side were draped with Nottingham lace curtains. Gypsy tables and *étagères,* and hanging book-shelves filled in what space was left. Every thing in the room was cheap and tawdry, except the girl at the window and a middle-aged woman, who lay on the aforesaid lounge. One hundred dollars would have more than covered the cost of the furniture and other effects in that parlor.

It was essentially a woman's room. The scented bags, the embroidered draperies, and ribbons were redolent of violet. There was not one chair in which a man could seat himself with any feeling of comfort or safety. He might feel at ease on the lounge, perhaps, but Mrs. Larch always appropriated that article herself, because it was comfortable and picturesquely placed, and just the point for her lazy airs and graceful poses. No one else by any lucky chance ever secured it.

The girl stood at the window and looked at the zig-zag streaks of sunset color lingering in the evening sky. Far up in the heavens pale stars twinkled a greeting. She was tall and slim, and finely formed. Her face, though not ravishing or remarkable in its beauty, was of the kind that arrested attention. It was a dark, colorless oval face, the eyes large and dusky—rare,

tender eyes forsooth—and the hair, eyebrows and eyelashes were brown enough to be called black by courtesy. A nameless air about her plain gray cloth gown, the manner in which she stood, the poise of the head—each was a passport to favor and a guarantee of distinction.

The woman on the sofa was pretty and young in the half-light. She had a piquant face, cunning dimples, and soft, fluffy, brown hair that curled about her well-shaped head like a child's. There were diamonds in her ears, at her throat, and on her fingers—indeed the dainty little hands blazed with gems. She had on a tea gown of pale blue—the delicate shade which mothers like to put on their babies—elaborately trimmed with white lace and satin ribbons. Even to the uninitiated the costume and the jewels represented a tidy sum of money. This was one of those women who always have what they wish, irrespective of the claims of others. If her own tastes and caprices were in question, money was not spared nor considered. Her notion was that the world owed her a living, and a soft, good living at that, and she was determined to have it regardless of cost, or what she would term, sentiment. Under the pretty, delicate, caressing exterior there lurked a spirit of such iron power, such determination that everything had to give way to it. She always had her way. Sometimes people knew that she did; more frequently they did not. However, that made little real difference; she never gave in, and naturally her persistence, her obstinacy carried the day. Obstinate people always have their way, and if that alone could bestow it, theirs should be the happiest lot in life.

After awhile Grace let the curtain fall, and came across the room, stopping at the lounge in the shadowy corner. Her walk was easy, graceful, dignified—just what might have been expected from the owner of that interesting and intellectual face. With a gesture, which was the embodiment of grace, she sat down upon a hassock at the side of the lounge.

"At last! You have really remembered that I am in the room," Mrs. Larch said, in her purring way, which was one of her most strongly-marked traits; "It amused me to watch you, Grace dear. You were truly charming—for once. And you know you are not often charming. I am a woman, so I do not hesitate to tell the truth. Besides being a woman, I am also your step-mother, and consequently my veracity is to be depended upon. And, my dear, I have no reason for flattering you."

In her caressing way she could say the most annoying, disagreeable, and insulting things. And she always said whatever she liked to say; her tongue was given full sway at all times and in all places.

"Yes, I have been watching you," she continued, smiling into the face before her; "there is no detective like a member of one's own family. I have been watching you all day. You have been in one of your moods. It might be called dreamy, sad—well, anything interesting, by an outsider. But I have quite a different name for it. Never mind what it is; I shall not tell."

The girl said nothing. She sat there in silence, looking at the pretty hands and the flashing rings before her.

"You have been positively interesting to-day. I almost said provoking. The other word is prettier, isn't it? You have been silent, thoughtful—and important. There is something on your mind, and you may as well tell me what it is."

Still Grace said nothing; she had not taken her eyes off the diamonds, sparkling in the twilight.

"Come, dear, this is the witching hour—the time for confidences. Do you not mean to confide in me? A girl's best friend is her mother. I have been your mother these eighteen years."

The girl smiled to herself in the dark. She did not speak.

Mrs. Larch sat up and, bending over, laid her soft, round cheek against her step-daughter's head. It was an effective pose.

"I am positive you have something to tell me," she whispered; "I have felt so from the time you kissed me good-morning at breakfast, up to now. Come! Here—heart to heart—is there not something to tell me?"

"Yes. And I wonder if you will be surprised. I was. I have had the thought that you knew. But I may be mistaken. Few people think alike, after all. Why should we?"

"Do not be provoking. I am inquisitive; I know you have something to tell me. You dear girl—you know that I am the kind of woman who delights in secrets. So, you have one? I was sure you had. You could not have acted as you have done, if this had not been a question of importance."

There was a pause. She waited in her fetching pose

—her dimpled cheek still rested against the girl's head.

"I dislike conjectures; tell me what it is outright."

"Mr. Duncan has asked me to be his wife."

She suddenly sat bolt upright in the dark; involuntarily she pressed both hands over her heart. Grace could not see her expression, nor did she observe the movement.

"Mr. Duncan has asked you to be his wife!" she exclaimed with a little sharp cry; "he loves you? I am surprised to hear it. So this is what has been on your mind all day? No wonder you were so odd. He wants to marry you? How very strange!"

"Is it not? I cannot understand it, and I agree with you in your surprise."

Mrs. Larch said nothing further; she still sat upright with her hands pressed against her side.

"But you no doubt have noticed his behavior of late. He has been so much with us. Nearly every week he has been to Tenbrook on some pretext or other."

Of course she had noted it; but with this difference, she had attributed Duncan's obvious attentions to quite another person.

"He has been conspicuously kind and attentive to our family. I could not blind myself to anything so apparent. But I have wondered at his great kindness to me, a poor girl, whose beauty is a subject of doubt to all her friends. He loves me! There is the plain fact. How can any man love Grace Larch?"

There was an impatient gesture from the lounge.

"You need not adopt the sensitive rôle when with me," the woman said with intentional cruelty; "I

know you, and you know me. You are worthy of Duncan's love, or any man's love for that matter. Any woman is. You know my opinion of men. It is not strange that he should want to marry you. With him, as with the general run of men, it is, I suppose, any woman, so long as it is a woman. It is the most natural thing in the world that he should want to marry. But as to his loving you—why that is another matter. He is old enough to know better."

She forgot that she was contradicting herself; but this is a peculiarity of those people who allow themselves the luxury of talking too much, and one in keeping with her character, which was one of contradiction.

"Shall I light the lamp?" the girl asked with a gay laugh, and rising; "it is past seven o'clock."

"Not yet. It is pleasant to sit in the dark and talk with you, dear. Does that not go without saying? Come, you have not told me enough. I want to know how he proposed. Men are absurd at such moments. I could tell you some ludicrous proposals, ludicrous in the way the men went about them, in my own life, if I cared to reveal the past."

Her step-daughter was silent. The proposal of a good man was a sacred thing to her, and not to be gossiped about to a third person.

"You will have to tell it. I shall not let up until you do, no matter how much you force me to drive you. You are so queer about some things. I dare say you have some silly notion about the honor of the thing. Well, I have not. I know that men talk women over, when together, in the freest, most barefaced way,

and that too in regard to our most intimate relations with them. You may as well begin. You must tell me the old, sweet story, of which we women never weary."

"If I must, I must."

She leaned against the mantel-piece while she spoke, having left the lounge.

"I went to walk yesterday afternoon in the woods at the other end of town. It is my usual walk when I am out for pleasure and exercise, as you know. Well, I ran across Mr. Duncan as soon as I had gotten into the woods. I was walking slowly, brushing the fragrant fallen leaves underfoot as I walked. I had no idea that he was anywhere near. But there he was, seated on a huge rock overhanging the brook. He was throwing dead leaves into it and watching them carried away. He did not appear surprised to see me. I now think he was in that exact spot on purpose. I know I have often mentioned it as being a favorite of mine. On seeing me, he sprang to his feet, and came to where I stood. He was eager, and held out his right hand. As I took it, he said: 'Miss Larch, I am very glad you have come, for I have something to tell you. I have been waiting here to see you.' I laughed, and said, that I hoped it was nothing sad or serious. And as I spoke, I remembered that he had stopped calling me Grace. You know that it was always Grace, and never Miss Larch—except latterly. He smiled at me, and replied that it was a serious matter to him, but by no means sad, and that he trusted it would be serious with me, too. Even then I did not suspect his meaning. In a quick, direct way he told

me that he loved me. He said he had been coming to Tenbrook the past year solely because he wanted me to marry him. He had always loved me, but during this time he realized that he loved me in but one way, and that he had studied me with a view of proposing in the end. He asked me to think the matter over. He would not take his answer then. I am to see him to-morrow. We talked some time—or rather he did, telling me of his home, of his business and his position. I finally got away. I left him standing under the trees watching me on my homeward way with love-lit eyes. He may be there still, for all I know to the contrary."

Her listener breathed a sigh whose intensity expressed her interest and attention.

"It was not romantic," she said gayly; "it was prosaic instead. And that is the way with elderly men. There is no romance in them."

"Well, I do not know," the girl said; "it seems most romantic to me. At least the scene could not have been more romantic surely. The autumn world seemed to speak for him. The very babbling of the brook as it ran over the mossy rocks in its bed was, I fancied, in sympathy with the story, and sang to me: 'Love him, love him, love him.' At that moment I did not appear to be Grace Larch. There was another girl in her place. I was excited; I was touched; and I pleaded with myself in his behalf. Do all girls feel so when men propose to them?"

"Duncan is an elderly man."

"I know he is. You have alluded to his age once or twice already."

"I should not have thought that he desired a young

wife," Mrs. Larch said with sarcasm. She could not help it. Her lute-like tones had changed for the moment. One cannot be on guard all the time.

"Yes; he is elderly. I believe he is fifty years old, but old men make the best of husbands, do they not? It is better to be an old man's darling than a young man's slave."

"No doubt, dear, an old man would love and cherish his wife. Younger men love with ardor, impetuosity, and spirit, while the fever is on. The fever, however, does not last. All men are more or less inconstant in love, according to my thinking."

Grace laughed.

"You have not said what you intend to do—what answer you mean to give him to-morrow. Of course you do not love him?" She waited a moment, but there was no response.

"It is impossible that you should love him. I do not wish to influence you in any way. Perhaps you would blame me in after days if I did. Here is a matter of moment, in which you stand alone, and in which you must act as you deem best, I have nothing to say about it. You must not let me influence you."

"I will not. There is but one answer I can give him."

"That is?"

"No."

"The cold, cruel, little word—no!"

Was it merely idle fancy on the girl's part, or did her step-mother really start with relief and pleasure? The purring voice was certainly glad and animated when she spoke again.

"Dear, it is as I expected. I knew you never would marry Duncan. You are too good, and too noble to marry for mere money or position. Love after all is greater than money and position; and yet it is good to have both."

Grace lighted the lamp and adjusted the huge, impossible paper poppy which was fastened to the same as a shade.

"I rather dread seeing him. I like him too well to wish to cause him pain and disappointment. But no more of him! We have settled his suit, as far as I am concerned, forever."

"I would not be so sure, dear. Have we really settled it? Bear in mind that he is a man, therefore persistent. Men do not at once relinquish that which they set their hearts on having. I think I know something of men."

"It is settled as far as I am concerned. I do not love him, and therefore I will not marry him. He cannot make me do it, if I do not wish."

Mrs. Larch smiled in a somewhat knowing way, and put on a bright, arch air.

"You do not know men as I know them. However, each woman has to buy her own experience of them. I hope you will not have to pay too high a price for yours. I paid well for mine."

"At times I really think that I shall never, never marry," the girl said in a slow, grave way; "marriage does not seem to me to be the alpha and omega of a woman's life. So far, I have gone without the male element, and I feel that I could go on so indefinitely, quite well pleased. I am able to work. I am

able to fight the battle for and by myself—and I would begin to do it to-morrow, if you would not oppose it."

"Do not let us get to that again!" was the impatient retort; "it is absurd. I hoped you had given up the idea, knowing how much your sister and I object to it. It is repugnant to us, and as there is no need whatever of your working, I shall never agree to it. We have always been counted a genteel family, and that you should lower us to the rank of wage-workers is really something we will not submit to."

"But I fail to see—"

"There, discussion is useless. I have no taste for argument. I will not be bullied into arguing this thing again. I have done with it. It must be dropped once for all."

The girl bit her lips until they were white, and said nothing. The color rose in her dark cheeks and there was a rebellious look in her eye at being so summarily silenced.

II

ADAM DUNCAN came for his answer at five o'clock the afternoon of the next day.

It was a dreary, rainy day, decidedly unpropitious to one bent on a love errand. He, however, was a strong, healthy man, who knew what he wanted, and weather, fair or foul, never had any effect on him. If he gave the rain and mud a thought it was not one of annoyance, but rather of satisfaction—indeed they were in his favor, for of course Grace Larch would not venture out of the house on such a wet day, unless forced to do so by some circumstance over which she had no control.

By the way he kicked off his rubbers, shook his umbrella, and pulled the bell-knob, one could easily tell that he was a man who always had his way, that he was quick, ready, assured, and not afraid of anything or anybody. On the maid answering the ring, he asked for Miss Larch without a trace of embarrassment. He walked into the parlor with a strength and presence that shamed the impossible flower paintings, the imitation rugs, the execrable copy of the "Angelus," the beribboned chairs—in fine, all the silly feminine odds and ends that Mrs. Larch and Cecily had stuck about the room as ornamentation.

He did not sit down. He knew those chairs of old, and, as he was a heavy man and had lively recollec-

tions of his former experiences in them, he preferred to stand.

Duncan was a splendidly formed man of distinguished bearing. He stood six feet three, and the breadth of his chest was good to see. The color in his face and clear gray eyes gave the lie direct to his age, which was fifty years. The straight figure was another lie, the thick hair, almost flaxen, still another—really there was nothing about him that revealed his age. He was simply a magnificent man in health, in features and in general appearance. The clothes and linen he wore were of the finest texture and cut, and bore witness to the pleasing fact that he cared for his person in a degree that escaped dandyism, but touched fastidiousness, in short, that he had the instincts of a gentleman.

Mrs. Larch and her step-daughter were upstairs in the front bedroom sewing, when the bell was heard. At its sound, the former dropped her work and looked at Grace, and laughed. It was not an agreeable laugh, and it was so significant that the girl colored.

"There is 'Auld Robin Gray,' Grace dear."

"Grace dear" arose, and carefully folded the cloth she had been sewing and, without speaking, put it away.

"If I dared I would listen at the keyhole, and hear what you say to him. But I am too indolent, and beside I know you will report to me afterwards."

The girl went toward the door in silence.

"Give him my love after you have refused him your own," she said, as a parting shot; "perhaps I shall catch him on the rebound—who knows? And ask him

to stay to tea, for auld lang syne sake. There's deviled ham, also omelet, English muffins, fig cake and coffee. Men need to be fortified, you know, after being dragged through the vale of humiliation and disappointment by women."

Grace closed the door upon herself with a little bang, but she could not shut out the disagreeable laugh that followed the words she had just heard. It rang in her ears until she stood at the parlor door. She forgot her momentary irritation, however, the instant she entered and saw Duncan's face lighten up in welcome. He was a noble, good-looking gentleman, and had always been a most kind and gentle friend to her, and her people as far back as she could remember. It was a pity she was unable to repay his courtesy and kindness as he wished.

He took the hand she extended him and, holding it in a warm, firm clasp, looked straight at her, then at the hand he held, and smiled a tender, beautiful smile. He smiled because he found that he was saying this to himself:

> The white enchantment of her dimpled hand
> Lay soft in mine! I looked into her eyes;
> I knew I was unworthy, but I felt
> That I was noble if she did but smile.

And she did smile. It seemed so strange that he should love her as he yesterday said he did, that he should want to marry her, and that she was upon the point of informing him it could never be. Indeed it was almost presumptuous that she should speak with him on such themes as love and marrying at all—he

was so rich, so influential, so much older and more important than herself, an ordinary, obscure girl. She looked at his broad, white hand, and observed that it showed the attention of the best manicure, with the hope that he did not give hers as close observation; for of course if he did he would see that she had never engaged the services of a manicure in her life.

He had no idea of letting her hand go; he held it in his firm, warm clasp, and smiled on. Women were dear to him, and though he had gone through many years single, unyoked, yet he had loved once or twice—well, several times, if the truth must be told. He was the kind of man to love women and be loved by them more or less ardently in return. Nevertheless, he had never wished to be bound to one—until now. He loved this woman with the love that meant marriage. There are many ways of loving, and all unconsciously Grace had been blessed with the best he had to give.

As he stood holding her hand and gazing at her bowed head he thought of the other women that had come and gone in his life, realizing that they were dead to him forever, and that in the hereafter there could be but one woman for him, and she was with him now. He yearned for her; through every fibre of his being he knew that this was his wife; that without her life would not be what it should be, half its promise and glory would surely be gone. To-day he knew that Richter was correct in saying that "no man can either live piously or die righteous without a wife"—at least *he* could not.

"Are you going to be my wife?" he said in a low, rich voice, the lover's voice.

She did not speak at once. Some unknown power held her back.

"I love you—I love you!" he said, and it must be admitted—it was beautiful the way he did it. But, as if by instinct, men know how to woo; and besides instinct, this man had experience. It is said that the man that has a tongue is no man if with his tongue he cannot win a woman. Duncan meant to try.

"My dear girl, I do love you better than anyone I ever saw. I think of you constantly, and I want you constantly. My whole being cries out for you, and only you."

She lowered her head a little more.

"Come to me, Grace—come to me—my wife!"

He waited a second. However, she did not speak.

"I know you have thought it over," he continued; "as I asked you to do, for I have always known you to keep your promises. That is one reason why I love you. Good, faithful, conscientious folk are scarce nowadays. I am quite sure that you have been thinking of me ever since I spoke to you yesterday—come, tell me, have you not?"

A pause.

At last she felt strong enough to look up at him and speak—she must speak; for if she did not, he doubtless would go on in the strain he had adopted, and there was no telling whither she might not be led by it. Above anything, in spite of all, a plain duty was before her: she must be true to herself. She must not permit him or anybody else to lead her where she ought not to go. It would be better to endure pain and disappointment now than wretchedness and regret after-

ward. With this one thought clear in her mind, she found strength to look up into the cleanly-shaven face before her, straight into the shining, smiling gray eyes.

"Mr. Duncan," she said; "I have given my best thought to what you proposed yesterday. I have tried to be kind and just. Do we not deserve that from others? I have thought and thought, and asked myself again and again if I loved you as you deserve to be loved, and the answer is always—no."

Another pause.

He did not look pained; he even smiled.

"I have an affection for you. You know that. But you ask me to marry you, and that is another thing."

"Do I not appeal to you at all?"

"Yes; I confess that I like and respect you; that I have ever regarded you as the best of friends, of my father's, of my family's, and of my own.

"Do you love anyone?"

"No."

"Well, could you not—learn to love me?"

She was silent.

"I have known you many years; I understand you. I love you devotedly. I am confident that I could make your married life a beautiful one. I am rich; I have every means with which to sweeten life—as you are aware. I comprehend and enjoy the things you enjoy. Does not your heart tell you so? For years your father and I were tried friends. He would have been happy over our marriage—nay, will he not be now? Grace, I read your heart. You have not been satisfied for some time past. Do not attempt to deny it. I will

not specify the cause or causes; the fact remains, and it is enough. My dear girl, you do not want to pass all your days in this stupid town surrounded as you are—come, you know you do not. Will you let it be no then? Suppose we wait awhile—ten days—a month—any time you like."

"We might wait ten years, and it might be no then. Would it be right to become your wife, if I did not love you? Without love, what is married life?"

"It depends on what love really is. You admit that you do not love anybody, that you have an affection for me, that you respect me. I ask no more than that. Afterwards you will know more about it, and you will call it love."

"I cannot say that I love you, Mr. Duncan. It would not be true if I did. The friendly regard and esteem I entertain for you cannot be called love. And I feel that I cannot marry unless I do love. Of course, I am a believer in love; I am a woman; and naturally I have dreamt that some day I want to love, and be loved too. Call it a foolish fancy—an idle dream—and me a girl of sentimental ideas—if you will; but the fact remains unaltered, nevertheless."

"I can win your love, if you will marry me. You will love your husband as you dream of loving him. Give me the chance, Grace."

"I cannot. Oh, I am sorry that such a thing as this could occur between you and me."

"I will not give you up, dear. I will not take no for my answer. You must think it over, and I shall see you again."

"I realize that you pay me a great honor. Believe

me, I am grateful. But honestly, I can never be more to you than a friend—if that is anything to you."

"It is; but you will be something dearer than a friend before long. I shall come back to you on the same errand."

"I wish to retain your friendship. We all do. One does not find real friends every day."

"And one is not loved every day."

"My step-mother told me to say she expected you to remain for tea," Grace said, changing the subject.

"It is impossible; for I am obliged to return to New York at once, and you know the train leaves just as you sit down to supper."

"I am sorry. You will miss seeing Cecily this time. But we expect her back soon."

"I am glad that she is to return soon—for your sake. You love her so much, and she is the kind of girl one misses at home."

"I miss her more than I can tell."

"She is a lively girl," he further remarked, because he was loath to leave, and he knew he was giving pleasure; "she is pretty and highly gifted too."

Grace flushed with enjoyment. It was always good to listen to people praising Cecily.

"She was anxious to visit her friend, Ella Barclay, of Hartford, and consequently we were glad that she could do so. She has been gone three weeks."

"Your sister is going to be a brilliant woman."

"Why, she is already a woman—according to her own thinking. She is seventeen, you must remember."

"She is a lovely girl, with madcap tendencies. I am continually expecting a practical joke at her hands."

The girl laughed, and felt better than she had done for several days past. For a moment she thought she really liked this man very much.

"Cecily loves fun," she said brightly; "and keeps us amused. You know that a merry heart does good like a medicine."

"A laugh is worth a hundred groans in any market, if you believe Charles Lamb," he rejoined, holding out his hand; "I must say good-by now. Think of me, Grace."

"Will you not let me call my step-mother? She would like to see you."

"No. Please bid her good-by for me. I have barely time to go to the hotel and then catch my train. Think of me, dear, and try to see the way clear to telling me what I want to hear so much on my return. Remember that I love you with a love that can never grow cold and die."

She gave him her hand with one word:

"Farewell!"

He took it, and almost embraced her in the old, familiar way, for he had been coming to and going from their house for years and had been a staunch friend of the family. But the relationship had, at least for these two, undergone a change, and the former ways of meeting and parting were out of the question. It was merely a handshake and a word now.

She went to the window and looked at him going through the rain. He was strong and good; he was generous and kindhearted, and handsome and distinguished in appearance. Life with this man would be easy, pleasant, noble, no doubt, and many a woman

would be glad to marry him and lead it; but she did not love him. Her pulse never quickened at his coming, nor grew dull at his going. He was only a true, dear friend—nothing more. And the wind sighed through the leafless trees and around the house, and the rain came pouring down. And she stood there at the wet window looking down the wide street, some time after she had seen the last of him, thinking, thinking.

III

GRACE was not allowed to stand and dream at the window long. She was aroused and her thoughts dispelled by the entrance of her step-mother, who looked pretty and youthful and *chic* in a new house dress. As soon as she had gotten fairly into the room she looked about the place in an expectant way.

"Where is Mr. Duncan?" she asked sharply; "surely you have not permitted him to go?"

"I could not get him to stay. I asked him to do so. I gave him your invitation, but he would not accept it."

"No doubt—in the way it was extended. I know your ways. He should have been made to stay. You have no idea how to manage a man."

Mrs. Larch went to the door, opened it, and called out, in a voice far from sweet or well modulated:

"Blanche!"

After some delay the call was answered. A huge, smiling negress presented herself.

"You call me, Miss Larch?"

"Yes. You need not devil the ham, nor make the omelet, nor toast the muffins. Miss Grace and I are alone this evening. Dry toast and tea will do."

When the maid had gone, she threw herself upon the lounge with a sigh.

"A nice supper saved! He will not do as well at the hotel."

"Mr. Duncan returns at once to New York," Grace announced.

"Indeed! Did you at once give him his *congé?*"

The girl would not answer the question.

"I trust, dear, that you are not going to be obstinate. Are you not going to tell me what I wish to hear? Must I undergo the fatigue of the pumping process? Try to be kind for once."

There was no response.

"How did the ordeal pass off? I timed you by the clock. You had nearly half an hour. A great deal can be said in that space of time. And I will be bound you and he had enough to say, pro and con. I can picture the scene. Shall I?"

The girl was silent. She could not speak of Duncan to her step-mother. She respected him, and her regard for him was of such a nature that it was impossible to detail their interview to a third person, even if that person were a relative. Perhaps she was old-fashioned, sensitive, foolish; nevertheless, she could not expose him and what she felt to be a sacred thing—a man's love.

"I am sure it was a funny piece of business," her step-mother said with cruel intention, for she was annoyed at this reticence; "you are queer, and he elderly and in love. The combination is unique to say the least. I should like to add this experience to those I already possess. It will make rich food for reflection some day."

Grace walked slowly to and fro, and being a woman, managed to escape all accidents in the crowded room.

"Come, dear, you must tell me all—everything he said and what you said, giving in passing how you both looked. Behold! A woman consumed by curiosity.

Have you no pity? I am actually wild to hear all about it. Do we often have delightful breaks in our monotonous existence? Proceed!"

"There is little to tell. I gave him to understand that it could not be; that I could not marry him."

"And did he say, thank you, and go without further ado? No; I warrant he did not. Men do not act that way."

"Of course, we talked it over, and I am sure he realizes how I feel. I hope you will excuse my saying anything more, when I tell you it is painful to me."

"Fiddlesticks! So he has left Tenbrook? Well, he will return in a fortnight at the latest, but whether altogether to see you remains to be seen. He has not gone for good."

Grace had closed the conversation, at least as far as she was concerned, but her step-mother could not leave it immediately.

"I expected some dramatic effects," she said in her airy manner; "for love is not truly love unless tinged with the dramatic or thrilling element. Love is in reality, a burning, a consuming fire. But fancy you on fire! It is an impossibility, dear. You are cold—queer—uncongenial to men and women alike. It is to be expected that you should conduct an affair of the heart in a cut-and-dried manner—all debit and credit, you know, and nothing else possible."

The girl leaned against the bay window and listened to the rain beating on the panes.

"How differently Cecily would have conducted it—or any other girl for that matter! There would be light and shade, dramatic color, thrilling effects; every-

thing played in character and in tune. And now—"

Grace was pained. She recognized and acknowledged, to herself at any rate, her physical and mental shortcomings, yet even to her, whose mind was above pettiness as a general thing, it was at the present moment more than usually bitter to be accused, and then blamed for what she could not help. She had not made herself. She had not selected her environment: that was not a matter of choosing.

"If you could but be somewhat like Cecily—only a little bit. She is clever, pretty, diverting. Everybody admits this. You might take a few lessons from her in many things. She is a fascinating girl."

Yes; of course she was her superior in beauty, in bearing, and in personal charm. It was the truth; she had never denied it. Instead she had always owned it, and gave way to her in a degree that was absurd and uncalled-for. At her hands all the praise, all the homage that one liberally dowered by the jealous gods could expect to receive was rendered with unselfishness and generosity, almost without a parallel. Never had she shown how hurt she was over her step-mother's unkind, often cruel, remarks, for her disposition was such that she would much rather suffer and endure in secret than bare her heart to an alien gaze.

"I am so anxious to have her back," Mrs. Larch continued, as if bent on wounding the feelings of the listener; "she is so gay and agreeable. The very air seems different when she is absent. Of course she will have much to tell us. And she knows how to talk. Few girls understand that art. I daresay it will be Christmas before she will have finished. Dear Cecily!"

There Grace stood without a word, her hands convulsively linked together; her face pale and set. This was her martyrdom. The rain beat against the windows; the wind moaned; the outside world was as dreary and monotonous as herself. As she thought of herself her eyes looked wet, but there were no tears. She seldom wept. An evidence of hardheartedness, her step-mother characterized this trait. Cecily wept readily at moments of grief, joy, surprise, anger. Eyes are made clear and sparkling by frequent tears, to quote again from the aforesaid source. Cecily's were clear and sparkling, and it may be that her April showers were responsible for their remarkable brilliancy.

"She is bewitching," Mrs. Larch said, again striking the familiar tune, which, strange to say, had no melody whatever in her listener's ears at this stage of the evening.

"Yes; she is all of that," the girl said; "she is all you say she is. No one ever thought of denying it. She is a lovely girl. Everybody can see that."

She walked slowly across the room as she spoke. She reached the door; it closed on her softly as she uttered the final word of praise.

Mrs. Larch reclined among the pillows of the lounge with a smile on her face, and thought over certain things. She did not care for her step-daughter, and nothing was gained by pretending that she did. And it was enjoyable to indulge her true feelings, in one quarter at least. One cannot play a part for years without a break some time. She and her daughter could get along very well indeed without Grace Larch. She was far from being indispensable to them; it fre-

quently turned out a hard thing that there was such a person in their world. Her presence there had to be endured; she had to be allowed a part of the small income which had been left them at the death of her father. The truth of the matter is, one ought not to marry a widower with children. It was a mistake. She had held this opinion before her marriage as a mere opinion and without experience to substantiate it, and now, having had the experience, she knew she had been correct in thinking so. She had never become accustomed to the girl being Alfred Larch's child.

Whenever she looked at her or thought of her she remembered with the old jealous pang that he had been married before and that she had been the second wife. And this was bitter as gall. She should have been the first as well as the last. To be second was almost more than she could bear, so patience here must not be expected. She could not get used to the fact that there had been a wife and child too before her advent. If this girl could go away and stay away—of course in a fashion befitting their social standing—or that she and Cecily could, all would be fair. An arrangement like that would make them happier, better, gayer.

One admires certain people at a distance. Here they were cramped at every turn. And three women thrown upon one another, without a man in the house, naturally found life somewhat prosaic at best, and at times rather hard to carry along. Lately a hope had dawned on their horizon that a change might come—if she married again. And that seemed more than likely. She was not too far advanced in years for a second marriage. If money and a great establishment were

in prospect the change would be altogether desirable. Up to yesterday she had thought there might come that change in her life. But it turned out that she had been indulging in foolish castle-building.

Instead of seeking a sensible, well-bred woman, suitable to him in age, as well as in manner, tastes and intelligence, Adam Duncan had the weakness, the poor taste, to think of a girl in every particular unsuited to him. He had asked her to marry him—to be the head of his establishment in New York City. Was this not proof of the folly of men and of the incredulity of women? How could such a man as Duncan think that a girl like Grace would fancy him as a husband? She was a self-willed, proud, obstinate girl, who dreamed all manner of ridiculous dreams which required time, patience and strategy to oppose and overthrow. Even now, after a trying warfare, she could not place any confidence in the girl and the various promises she had exacted. Every morning she awoke with the fear that she would be openly defied at last; that these same ridiculous dreams were being made something more real and disturbing than mere girlish dreaming. And then, what should they do? Could he really love a girl like that? He ought to have looked elsewhere—a man, so rich, so refined, and well on in years. Grace could never rise to his ideal. He had come to Tenbrook and to their house in a most familiar and significant way for more than a year. The entire neighborhood regarded him in a peculiar light—in fact, he and they were a common theme of gossip. Only a week ago the society journal, the *Elite,* hinted broadly at a prospective marriage between a popular widow and

a distinguished visitor, and she had been compelled to parry numerous jocular remarks relating to the matter. Everybody in the place knew that she had been receiving and entertaining Duncan; her *intimes* were aware of the trouble she had taken, and even expense she had been put to in providing delicious dinners, suppers, and parties for his pleasure. For what purpose had she devised surprises for his palate? Truly, not for the end now reached. No a thousand times! She had not entertained that thought for a moment. It was hard, provoking, in a sense insulting; it was in truth well nigh beyond endurance. Her step-daughter would not marry him, and of course she ought not, for such a thing as that would be presumptuous, to say the least. And so Duncan would go elsewhere, and probably marry a woman they had never heard of. His wealth and position would be lost to them forever. And to think of the fuss and the expense she had gone to for the sake of this man! Really women are fools. But she at least ought to have known better, for she was experienced in men's ways. As for Grace, she did not possess sufficient sense to go into the house when it rained. No doubt she had frightened the man away by her manner of refusing him, and they would not see him soon, if ever. That chance would not occur again. If she could have managed the affair herself he would not have escaped. One of them would have married him; there could have been no hitch. Well, why had she not taken it in hand? Simply because a different development was anticipated. The present turn was unexpected. All this time she was getting up nice and dainty meals, dreaming over, and dressing

herself for something Duncan had had no intention whatever of bringing about, and so she had let a rare, a golden opportunity slip by from sheer stupidity. Nobody was to blame but herself. It was indeed a serious blunder on her part, but it is said that one learns by one's blunders. She should have made her step-daughter marry him willy-nilly, if she found that he positively would not be content with some one else, rather than have let him go altogether. Fine, rich men of his age are not found every day. In a matter of such good fortune as this, self, egotism, all silly ideas in short, should have been regulated properly if their absolute banishment were out of the question; for a splendid marriage would be advantageous to the entire family. Both she and Cecily would have profited thereby beyond their fairest expectations. This man was wealthy, and kind, and generous as a friend. What would he not have been as a relative? Alas! How dull she had been! She was not even as clever as Grace. Her mistake was by far the greater. Perhaps if he came upon the scene once more, or if a similar opportunity presented itself to Grace or Cecily—or even to herself, she might have more sense and see her way more clearly. It is to be hoped that she would.

At this point the lady was disturbed in her musing by the opening of the door. Blanche, the negro maid, stood on the threshold.

"Tea is ready, Miss Larch," she said with an expansive smile.

"Very well; call Miss Grace."

"I don't know where she is."

"Find her then. She is somewhere about the house."

IV.

"It is time for me to go to meet Cecily," Grace said, as the town clock struck four one afternoon, one week after Adam Duncan's proposal and departure; "you known the train is due from Hartford at a quarter past four. I must hurry if I wish to see it come in. How good it will be to have her home again!"

She was pleasantly excited at the prospect, but not half as much as Mrs. Larch. That lady was stretched on the lounge, as usual, in a picturesque pose, and as usual arrayed with particular care. She affected tea gowns of daring designs, striking color and elaborate make, and on this occasion her selection was an odd affair of blood red surah and red net, against which her face and hands looked strikingly fair. Her pretty, eager face was flushed, and her eyes glittered. She had small, white, hands much beringed, of which she was inordinately vain. The gems sparkled incessantly, because she was nervous, and her fingers shook.

"I am exceedingly anxious," she said, with an affected laugh; "I wish I were able to control myself. I suppose it is because we live in this dead town and never travel. I used to be different. I can scarcely breathe. It is always so when Cecily is away. No one can be sure of her. Suppose she does not come to-day? I shall not feel easy until I see her face to face."

Grace laughed.

"Never have children, dear, if you wish to go through life cool, self-possessed, assured. They are in reality a disturbing factor."

The girl went away smiling at that. It was but a step to the railway station. What with her excitement and the sharp autumn air and the brisk pace at which she walked she was in quite a glow on reaching the waiting-room. There were several persons there whom she knew; but she did not stop to speak to them. She merely bowed, and passed on to the platform. Here she found an animated group of young people—four men and two girls—with whom she was acquainted. She joined them, and was cordially welcomed.

"I have come to meet my sister," she explained; "she has been visiting Ella Barclay, of Hartford. We look for her on this train."

Her information gave pleasure, especially to one of the men, Philip Cheever by name, and there was a perceptible amount of interest exhibited at once. Cecily Larch always aroused animation in people. She was what was termed a popular girl; she was a favorite wherever she went.

Cheever was an elegant fellow—clear-eyed, clean-shaven, ruddy-faced—arrayed in faultless style. He was Bostonese from hat to shoe.

"I am glad to hear it," he said; "Tenbrook has not been itself since she left—at least our set has not been. Don't we agree in that unanimously? By the by, Miss Larch, I am stage manager of a comedy we intend to bring out soon for the benefit of the orphanage. I must have you and your sister for certain rôles. We were speaking of it when you joined us."

"What is the piece?" Grace asked with interest.

"'A Scrap of Paper.' May I call to-morrow evening and talk it over? If we are successful in Tenbrook we shall give it in town for a similar charity."

"Tenbrook is to be the dog. If it survives, Boston will endure."

It transpired that the others of the group were in the cast, and they were consumed with a burning interest in the play. Immediately a lively conversation ensued in regard to it, and the well-known animus of amateurs was fully displayed.

Grace was as rabid as the rest on the subject of amateur performances, and, being counted among the leading *dilettanti,* took an active part in the present talk.

Soon, however, the agreeable discourse was interrupted. A heavy rumbling sound broke the country silence, and it grew gradually louder and louder. A long, dense line of smoke presently was seen; finally the train came puffing in sight. In a moment or two more the platform was crowded, as this was perhaps the heaviest train during the day. Passengers were alighting from, and others were quietly boarding the train; there was shouting and confusion all around. Grace was left by her friends, who were going to town and had already found their places in the parlor car. She stood apart from the hurrying throng, scrutinizing each face that passed, but to her surprise she did not see her sister.

In a few seconds, however, she had the satisfaction of seeing a man, some distance down the line, help a young lady descend from the car, who was none other than the one she looked for. The young lady appeared

to think it was no easy feat to descend two steps. She stood there coquetting in a light, careless way, attracting the attention of every man who would look. And all the men wanted to look, and did look in that bold, admiring manner which some women enjoy more than any other kind.

Grace looked on amused, yet disturbed. She disliked public attention herself and always experienced a mortified sensation when out of doors with her sister, much as she loved her. The staring, laughing admiration of porters, cabmen, and idle men on street corners, was not to her taste, in fact, it was painful and degrading. But Cecily enjoyed it in a butterfly way. Admiration was food and drink to her, and she had to have it, no matter what the source might be, so long as it was given in huge doses.

At last she reached the platform by jumping lightly down and screaming. The crowd had dwindled away by this time, and only Grace and one or two railway officials were left.

The young lady and her escort came along, towards where she stood waiting to receive her, indulging in the badinage, in which a certain class of the people of today take infinite pleasure and are exquisite adepts. They got quite up to the girl before being aware of her presence, so engrossed were they in one another.

Cecily was the first to look up. She uttered a shriek of delight and jumped forward.

"Oh, my dear, how good it is to see you again! And how well you look! Have you missed me?"

Her escort, the railway officials, the people at the car windows—all were looking on and listening. Perhaps

if the audience were not there she would not have been so demonstrative.

Grace enfolded her in an embrace so maternal that it proved to be diverting to the spectators.

"Welcome a thousand times!" she whispered with a kiss; "have I missed you? It seemed an age since you went away."

The young girl brightened; her eyes sparkled. She turned to her escort with a charming air.

"Mr. Tejon, allow me to introduce you to my sister, of whom you have heard me speak once or twice, I believe, within the past three weeks."

The gentleman bowed.

"And please remember," she continued, before he could speak; "that you are by no means to forget us, or lose sight of the little place called Tenbrook, or all the fun we have had together at Ella's. Come and see us in our own home. It is but a short run from Boston. And if it were a greater distance it would still be your duty, your pleasure, to come. For I ask you."

"I shall not forget."

"Promise me that you will come, and it will be binding. And when you come I shall take you to a german. I shall never, never forgive you if you do not. A woman scorned is a fearful thing. Come, promise!"

"It is a promise. You may depend on me. Good-by."

He held her hand and said something too low for anyone to overhear.

She stood transfixed. She watched him bow formally to her companion and take the train, which in

a moment after pulled out. That roused her. She laughed, and waved her hand to him, as he stood on the rear platform bareheaded, in her gayest manner.

Grace observed her sister with interest and some curiosity. She imagined there was a change in her or a difference, which as yet was indescribable—or perhaps it was but fancy on her own part. There might be nothing in it, after all.

"Is he not the handsomest man you ever saw?" Cecily demanded with a peculiar tone of triumph, as though she owned the man; "did you ever see such a face, such a form? In every line power is plainly discerned."

They were on their homeward way.

"No; he is not the handsomest man I ever saw. I have seen handsomer ones. Take for instance, your old flame, Philip Cheever; he is much better looking."

"That is a matter of opinion."

"Of course. Would it not be monotonous if we thought alike? Each eye forms its own ideal of beauty."

"Everybody in Hartford agreed in this: that Huerfano Tejon was the handsomest man seen there in many a year."

"What an odd name! I must get you to spell it. It sounds something like Waffano Tayhone. What is he? Where is he from?"

"His people were Spanish Americans, and he was born in the City of Mexico. Early in his life the family settled in Colorado. They are wealthy. He is the only child, and has a beautiful home at Colorado Springs. There are mines, ranches and railways in his possessions, I am told."

"Indeed! Another darling of the gods, and of course petted in every way. Some people are so fortunate."

"He is greatly blessed, but he is good and true and worthy of all he has."

"Philip Cheever wants you and me to assist in a production of 'A Scrap of Paper,' for the benefit of the orphanage. He is going to call to-morrow to decide on our parts. I have just seen him."

"He need not. I dislike amateur theatricals, and I think it bad form for a lady to pose before the rabble."

Grace started in surprise.

"Yes, I despise such things, and I am not going in for them any more in future."

"You astonish me," her sister said bluntly; "for hitherto you have gone in for such things, and could never have enough of them."

"I am no longer the same, dear. I have changed since I left home, and after seeing all I have, I am determined to be different."

Grace listened in amazement.

"You strike me as being different already. And what will mother say? You must get back to your old self. You must remain the same; for we cannot permit you to change, and so you had better know it now. None of us want you to change in any way."

"Many thanks for small favors! But how can you prevent time and change? You might as well tell the wind not to blow. I cannot help it; you cannot help it. Let me tell you something strange. The old Cecily is dead. And it all happened in one day, too. How many things can happen in a day!" And here she

sighed. It was a spontaneous bit of confidence, and it was accepted with unconcealed wonder and regret.

She laughed at the solemn face beside her.

"You goose!" she exclaimed, taking Grace's arm; "how long your face is! I will explain the sudden and marvelous alteration in your giddy, careless sister. It is not hard to do so. I really want to tell you too. But you must promise to keep it inviolate. That is the only color for a secret, you know. You are not to talk about it, or tell our inquisitive mother either. I shall tell her myself—when I am ready, but I wish to wait awhile. I wish to try our old life once more, in the old way, before I bid it farewell forever. And I must wait anyhow—for other reasons. Do you promise not to divulge the secret until I give you permission?"

"Yes."

"Well, then—here's my mighty secret: I am deeply in love. It is the first time, and of course it will be the last time."

For the moment her sister was unable to speak.

"And what is more wonderful than that, I am a married woman as well."

Grace uttered a startled cry, but she could not speak for very surprise.

"Yes; I am a wife, but you must not tell anybody. It is a secret for the present. I wanted to tell you, because I must tell somebody. I cannot keep such a secret as that. It would be asking too much."

Her companion walked on in silence, listening with sober face.

"I warrant you have never had a greater shock than

this. But you know, dear, it is the unexpected that happens. See what I got for leaving my country home! Love and a husband too, in such a brief space of time, are enough to make a more sensible and steady girl than myself, giddy—if nothing else. I wonder how you would stand it. You are so different."

"Leave speculation alone," her sister said, at last finding her voice; "tell me the rest of the affair. Half confidence is the worst kind of confidence."

"So it is; I quite agree with you in that. I am willing to leave speculation alone, and tell you as much as I can. But it cannot be much, because there is not a great deal in it."

"You are talking to gain time. Why not be true and frank?"

"I will be. There is nothing I am ashamed of. At Ella Barclay's was a gentleman whom I loved the moment I saw him, as he did me. You may well stare. It was that phenomenon, which the writing folk call love at first sight. I could poetize on the subject—if I tried. Can you, who I believe have never loved, comprehend my emotions during those joyous days in Hartford? Enough to say that every second was an indescribable experience, and that love does rule the feminine heart in a mysterious way. My visit at last drew to its close, and at the thought of separation both he and I suffered beyond words. In a moment of impulse—the kind of feeling people of your mind call madness—I yielded to his importunities and consented to a secret marriage. You exclaim at this. I did not care what kind of marriage it was, if I were but his and he mine. I love this man too much to

quibble as to how, why, and where. I was only too glad to marry him in any way. And besides that feeling you know I am a sentimental, romantic—ay, foolish girl. Such a silly proceeding appealed to me, and I was of course an eager party to it. There you know it all."

"All? I think I know nothing as yet. You talk, but you say nothing. Tell me why this man is not with you to-day? Tell me why he does not come with you like a man and have the marriage acknowledged? Why are you left to return home alone, and as though you were still the same young girl that left it a few weeks ago? Are you ashamed of your folly already? Where is the man? What do you two intend to do?"

The girl laughed in a reckless way full in her sister's face. It was very like defiance.

"How absurd you are, dear!" she exclaimed; "you are tragedy, or rather indignation, personified. And besides that you are a walking interrogation mark. I never dreamed that you could be ridiculous. One question at a time—if you please."

The two girls had reached their home, and they stood near the gravel walk that led between beds of dahlias, asters, and other late plants, up to the front door.

"Answer me this one question," Grace said imperiously, resting a hand on her sister's shoulder; "are you really in every way a wife?"

Cecily blushed at that hard question, and looked away.

"Why, what a thing to ask! You are a queer girl, dear."

"Answer me!"

"I do not like the tone you have adopted towards me. Suppose I decline?"

"Answer me!"

She hesitated.

"Yes or no?"

"No."

"I am so glad!"

Cecily ran swiftly up the path apparently relieved at being released from cross-examination. The door was opened wide, and her mother rushed forward with a cry of welcome. Grace lingered outside for a time in order to think and also to avoid witnessing the first transports of that meeting.

And in the evening, after tea, she effaced herself as much as possible, and sat in the background listening and watching. Mrs. Larch, in her lighthearted way, enjoyed the reunion to the utmost. She and her daughter were kindred spirits; they had always been more like friends than parent and child.

The quiet, unnoticed person in the shadowy corner fancied she saw many changes in the radiant young creature laughing and talking in the glare of the lamp light. There was a new, a feverish gayety; a studied attempt to say daring and funny things; in short, she appeared to be emancipated. It would not be long before others would observe these changes too, and of course the cause would be sought, and found. There would be no trouble, no embarrassment, no untoward complications if the husband showed himself on the scene in time, proclaimed the clandestine marriage, and so made the matter right. But he might not show himself. And then?

The girls were at last alone in their bedroom. The door was no sooner closed than Grace ran up to Cecily, and put her arms around the slim, young figure in a passionate way that made that young lady widen her lovely eyes in amazement.

"More tragedy and indignation and interrogation, dear?"

"Oh, do not laugh at me! I love you, and am anxious on your account. You know that I am never prying—never inquisitive."

The girl disengaged herself from her sister's embrace and, going to the dressing table, stood before the mirror unfastening her long, thick hair. It was beautiful blonde hair, and she never lost interest in it, so vain and proud she was of everything that was a part of herself.

"You must not disenchant me, dear," she said lightly, looking at the mirrored face, and brushing the hair in firm strokes; "I have always admired your character."

"You will not be unkind? You will not mind if I revert to your marriage again?"

"More questions?"

"Yes, I want to know more. I know enough to torment, but not enough to satisfy me. I must see things clearly."

"Of course that is always the way with people. They want each detail, each sigh, smile, tremble of the eye-lash, blush, and pulsation of the heart. And I thought you the exception! Ask, and let us get done with the business as quickly as possible."

"Tell me the man's name. Tell me when your mar-

riage is to be acknowledged. Tell me everything now."

"And if you do not life will be made disagreeable for you," Cecily added with a laugh. A pause.

"Let me see," she said finally; "to begin at the beginning will be best—or rather to your taste. We were married day before yesterday afternoon at four o'clock. It might have been ten minutes after. I am not sure. We were out driving. We were often out driving. He kept a fine horse and stylish trap at the stables. Of course he had gotten a license. He understood that I would not refuse him, so he went prepared. And he found a Baptist minister who willingly united us. If he had not, the probate judge was available. Now, why were we married clandestinely? Because he was obliged to leave Hartford. A sudden death had occurred in his family, and dispatches recalled him home to attend the funeral. He wanted to be sure of me. I am so valuable and so variable, you know. I made him think so, at any rate. Men must never know how weak we women are when we really love them."

By this time she had disrobed, and being ready for bed, sat down on the edge of it, and rested her face in the palms of her hands. She was pretty and dainty, and one could not help but love her, despite her faults.

"Dear," she said in an irresistible way; "you must not condemn me for what I have done. It is not bad—only romantic and foolish. This man is a gentleman, and we are really deeply in love. There was no time in which to plan for the future. He had to go home, but after he has arranged matters there he will come for me, and all will be well."

"Did he say you might tell us?"

"I forgot to ask him. In a week or ten days he will be here, and we shall see what we shall see."

"Why not tell your mother?"

"I do not wish to do it. You know how she will carry on, and I have determined to wait until he comes. He shall tell her and she will say nothing. I am not going to be nagged. A man is a wonderful institution with my mother and she acquiesces in all he says and does. I know that she will be delighted with this one."

"Will you tell me his name?"

There was no answer.

"I appreciate your reserve, and yet I think you can entrust his name to me."

"This is a side issue. You would not be wiser, if I told you his name."

"I do not care whether you tell me or not. I know it. Your husband is that man from Colorado with the outlandish name."

It was an unexpected outburst, and it went straight home. Cecily flushed and looked anywhere but at her sister. She hurried into bed. As Grace entered from the other side, she put her arms about her and whispered:

"You are right. He is Huerfano Tejon."

V.

THREE weeks had passed.

In that short space of time, however, a marked change had taken place in the Larch household.

Cecily had been first taciturn, restless, disagreeable, then finally she fell ill of typhoid fever. The leading physician of Tenbrook had of course been in attendance every day, much to the anxiety of the mother and the satisfaction of the patient, who craved attention if well or ill.

Mrs. Larch and Grace had been frightened, perhaps more than was necessary, over the case, but the patient was at present convalescent, all danger was over, and they were permitted to breathe freely again.

These are brief, bare facts, no doubt somewhat abruptly stated. However, if there is sufficient interest to read between the lines, a mass of detail, more or less interesting, but doubtless too voluminous for narration, will be discovered. Indeed it would consume more time and space and patience than ordinary people have at their disposal to write out in full, and to endure too, the thousand and one foolish actions, exaggerated alarms and meannesses that Mrs. Larch indulged in during this period of twenty-one days, to describe the drudgery and the domestic warfare forced upon poor Grace—the first because she was well and strong and slow to anger; the second, because spite and tyrannies must be vented somehow—and to portray the thor-

oughly selfish course adopted by the petted darling of the house.

At no time in her illness had there been a single symptom of danger. Combined with a slight attack of fever were temper, disappointment, chagrin, and irritability. It seems that Huerfano Tejon had not appeared on the scene as early as she expected, neither had she heard from him by letter or by wire. In itself this was beyond enduring and it made her ill. She was glad when fever did set in, and she was forced to keep to her room, and have the physician called in. It was fitting that she should be ill under the circumstances; the bed was the proper refuge for her. So she remained in it as long as she could, and pretended that she was worse than she really was, and complacently received the attentions of the physician and of the family as her due.

With remarkable temerity her sister several times broached the Tejon affair, and urged that Mrs. Larch be told, but it brought on such an amount of excitement and petulance that she was glad enough to leave the subject alone at last.

To cap the disagreeable situation the head of the family had maintained a hostile attitude towards her stepdaughter, and there was not a thing left unsaid or undone that might not make life a wretched thing. The method was so systematic and persistent that it was evident she had some object in view.

Such were the clouds on this horizon.

One afternoon towards the close of the three weeks, Mrs. Larch was, as usual, posed on the lounge in the tawdry parlor arrayed in a tea gown of pale green silk

set off with yards and yards of pink ribbon and creamy lace, with all her diamonds on, and her hair arranged in the most becoming way. Some distance off her stepdaughter rested in a rocking chair, near the bay window. Her hands were clasped together in her lap. She looked tired. Cecily had gone to her room, wishing to be alone, and her presence was not at all desirable at that time, for she had been exceedingly feverish and disagreeable company all day.

It had been a fretful day. Each one in the house had been more or less out of tune. The weather too was stormy, and it was impossible to go out of doors with any hope of enjoyment. For a whole week the weather clerk had visited Tenbrook with rain and sullen sky. With Mrs. Larch snappish, Cecily dull and silent, the domestic atmosphere was thundery. In sheer desperation and self defense Grace sought the kitchen, the one cheery spot in the house, and there with the negro maid of all work, she had passed the day in welcome work. In the distance she heard the stepmother lamenting and fretting and complaining of everything under the sun. Nothing was right. Everything was wrong. So she fumed. All the novels and magazines in the house had been read, the chocolate creams in the *bonbonnière* eaten, the aforesaid toilet of pink and green accomplished, and yet here she was with but a portion of the afternoon killed and a stupid evening with women in prospect. Oh, for a man to break the monotony of this life!

There was absolutely nothing for Grace to do either in the kitchen or any other part of the house, so she was on the point of donning a waterproof in order to

pass an hour out of doors, rain or no rain, when a sharp voice summoned her to the parlor. To escape was out of the question.

She put the waterproof down and obeyed the summons, knowing of old that it was easier to yield than to combat any of her step-mother's vagaries. She went to the parlor, found that her sister had gone upstairs, and quietly took the rocking-chair which she had vacated.

"I wish you to sit with me," her step-mother explained; "you have been with Blanche too much lately. You are spoiling her. She does not serve as well as she did a month ago."

After that there was silence.

"What is the matter with Cecily?" Mrs. Larch asked after awhile, not expecting an answer; "she is convalescent, and yet she does not improve. Is she worse than we imagine? It pains me to see her so unlike herself."

The girl did not appear to hear these plaintive remarks. She sat looking out of the window, wishing she could have gone out, wet as it was.

"What is the matter with her," was asked again; "have you any idea?"

"Do you not know?" Grace rejoined, Irish fashion.

"If I did, I would not ask."

"You have Dr. Irrmann. What does he say?"

Mrs. Larch hesitated a moment before answering.

"He says that she is rid of the fever, but that she is in a weak condition still."

"Well?"

"That she has delicate lungs; that there is a hint

of tuberculosis; that she must not stay here this winter; that she must be taken away as soon as possible."

"Well?"

"That the one climate for her now is that of Colorado."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and so I have been writing to various people there with a view of going. I have quite an amount of information already."

"Of Colorado Springs?"

"Yes, how clever of you to guess the very place! Dr. Irrmann recommended Colorado Springs, we prefer it, and the general opinion is unanimously in favor of that one spot."

"And what have you learned, as bearing on the case, that is favorable?"

"Many things. For instance, a friend there writes that their thermometer in the winter ranges in the seventies and eighties. The mountains stand like purple blots against the horizon, a haze softening the clear-cut outlines, which objects commonly assume in the intensity of Colorado sunshine. Probably no topic —not even George Washington and his hatchet or the silver question—has been more exhaustively discussed than Colorado weather. Yet when one thinks of a season ushered in by forty consecutive days of rain on the Atlantic coast and culminating in the terrible snow storms of the Sierras, it is difficult not to point the contrast. The climate alone of Colorado would make the words of Lysippus about Athens appropriate—'Whoever does not desire to see it is stupid; whoever sees it without being delighted is still more stupid;

but the height of stupidity is to see it, to admire it, and to leave it.' What do you say to that?"

"Nothing—except that it ought to be taken *cum grano salis.*"

"Of course you are skeptical. That is like you. And you know how anxious I am and how much is at stake."

"What other information does your friend give? I am really interested in all of it, whether you believe me or not."

"You ought to be. My friend says that no one can fail to be impressed with the rapid growth of the city. Colorado Springs has always been peopled by a well-to-do class of citizens, a majority of whom have been driven there through sickness of some member of the family. Once residents of the place they seldom leave, even after recovery, so fascinating is the climate and so pleasant the life."

"All that sounds well, no doubt. But what will you say to this? The passport to society in New York is money, in Baltimore beauty, in Philadelphia family, and in Boston brains. There is not much left to make a specialty for Colorado Springs, so perhaps the most pleasing way will be to say that a combination of money and brains is required, with the addition of family and beauty. You see, I too have been making inquiries in a small way."

"However, what you say hardly applies to us. We are not going to that distant, isolated part of the globe in order to penetrate the holy of holies of society, and you are perfectly aware of that fact. We shall need no passports of any kind."

"Well, let that drop. What of the place as a health resort? You have told me nothing so far that seems to warrant going that terrible distance."

"It is just the place, dear, for your sister's health. The pure, dry air laden with the balm of pine needles acts as a healing embrocation upon the surface of delicate or diseased lungs. The extraordinary purity of the air and its entire freedom from dust or pollen acts as a preventative of catarrh and hay fever, and to the weary brain worker the quiet shade and laughing brooks must be a never-failing source of rest and refinement. The temperature is mild during the winter, and invalids can stay there with perfect safety."

"Say no more! You are truly poetical. It is another paradise, and you have made up your mind to go. And I need scarcely add that Cecily has done the same."

"Yes, we both long to go to Colorado. We have talked it over carefully, but alas! I fear it cannot be done. There is not enough money in our treasury."

"How do you make that out?"

"It is, as you know, an expensive trip. We should have to travel first-class, and besides the fare, which is very dear, there are sleeping berths, meals, fees, cab hire, and perhaps hotel bills in the cities where one goes to different stations, or when one fails to make connection. And after getting there living is exorbitant, particularly if one happens to be an invalid, or as they say out there, 'lungers.' There are hotels, but nothing suited to our modest income. What can we do?"

"You are not obliged to live at a hotel. Why not take lodgings, and eat at restaurants, or boarding-houses? Surely there must be some such way."

"There is. We can hire two furnished rooms for thirty dollars a month. Table board is seven dollars a week *per capita.* Cecily's allowance added to mine, will make an income of seventy-five dollars a month. You see we cannot manage it on that, for of course there would be some extra expenditures."

"Take my allowance; with that you will have enough."

"And what would become of you? You must live as well as we. You would remain in Tenbrook—at home, but your daily wants, however slight they might be, would have to be defrayed."

"I should not require a great deal."

"No, dear, and with your share we could manage the undertaking handsomely. But we should want every cent of it. What is to become of you?"

"As usual I am in the way. At last you must yield, and consent to see me earn my own living. Does it not seem providential that I am able to do that?"

"Even if I did yield to this mad scheme of yours, I do not think for a moment that you could secure an opening immediately. If you worked, you would be obliged to begin at once, and people do not jump into vacancies on the stage without effort, as you seem to think. It would be weeks before you could get an engagement, for you are an amateur without money, influence or notoriety. To find an engagement you must go to a dramatic agency in Boston or New York. That would be the first outlay. The agents would refuse to enter your name on their books, being an amateur, and they would not procure you an opening, without a bonus. There is your second outlay. In the

event of being engaged, there must be a wardrobe, a box of make-up, one or more wigs and some cash on hand for the inevitable theatrical rainy day—when the troupe disbands, and the players have no alternative but to walk home. You see, I have refused to discuss the thing with you heretofore, but I flatter myself that I know something about it. No, dear, you shall not become an actress if I can prevent it. The idea is absurd, and you must abandon it. Cecily and I are not to be dragged down to that extent, if we can prevent it by fighting you in all directions."

"You forget that I am of age, and can do as I please."

"I have not forgotten that important fact. You can run away from home if you see fit to disgrace yourself and us. But you have promised to help your sister go away, and you will not break your promise."

"No, I will not. You may take my allowance and go to Colorado as soon as you deem expedient. I see you have thought the matter out, and of course you have found a way for me too."

"I have. There is but one way. However, I fear you will not listen to it for a second. Such a charming, easy, pleasant way it is too, for every one of us! How I wish you would listen to it, and acquiesce! You really ought not to be foolish and unreasonable at such a crisis as this."

"I am sure I shall try not to be. But what is this delightful plan? I am stupid; I cannot imagine what it is, and yet I am eager, yes willing, to do anything in my power to make the way clear for you and Cecily. I have been that all my life."

"You can marry," her step-mother said hesitatingly. She was not sure how the girl would take the suggestion.

"Why, what made you think of such a thing as that? Marry? How droll! To make a marriage you must have a man and a woman. Do not lose sight of that."

Mrs. Larch laughed in a subtle way that irritated her listener—why she could not have explained.

"You can marry as soon as you like and help your sister and me in many ways. And we need the help. It is your duty to help us if you can. Do you not see it?"

A great misgiving held the girl as if it were a vise, and she could not say a word for very fear.

"You can marry and give us your share of the paltry estate your father left. Need we mince matters? It will be pleasanter for us as a family, if you marry and go away. Is it not time you did, any way?"

"Whom shall I marry?"

"Adam Duncan."

"Oh!"

"Had you forgotten him? He has not forgotten you. He is still anxious to marry, and you may become his wife within a week. Only say yes, and the deed is done."

Grace started back as though she had been struck.

"I understand you," she said; "but it cannot be. I have refused him. I do not love him."

"Do you not admire—like—respect him?"

"Yes, but nothing more. I cannot marry a man unless I love him."

"You will have to do it. What has love got to do

with it? And what is love any how? That is always the way with women like you. You prate of love, love, love; and yet you know simply nothing of it. Here is our situation in a nutshell—as frankly as I can put it. I have rented the house to Dr. Irrmann for a special patient of his for the rest of the winter, and agreed to vacate it within ten days, or sooner if practicable. Your sister and I are going to Colorado. As for you, you must marry Duncan. I did not like this plan when I first knew it. But that is neither here nor there. The man is rich. He loves you. He wants you, and will take you without the bother of a trousseau and the usual fuss, to-day—to-morrow—any day—and so, it is desirable."

"And you, a woman, speak to me so?"

"Yes—I—a—woman. You are a fool not to jump at the chance. We are poor, and you know how we are always pinched. Do you hesitate? You like the man and he loves you. What more do you ask of fortune? As his wife, see how much you can do for us—if you are really so disposed. You are continually talking of helping and doing for us, and here is your chance. Will you do it?"

The girl hid her face in her hands and did not answer.

"This is a turning point for us, and if you hesitate and refuse this man we shall neither forget nor forgive. Have a little common sense—some regard for others—and look at the affair in the right way, I beg of you."

At this point she rose pettishly from the lounge, and moved towards the door—somewhat afraid, if the truth must be told, to remain longer with the girl after this

plain talking. As she put her hand on the door-knob she paused and looked around with a faint smile.

"Perhaps I had better tell you that Duncan and I have been in correspondence this week. I took advantage of our old friendship, and told him about your sister, and the predicament we are in. And he is extremely kind. He wants us to go at once, and generously offers to defray the expenses of the trip, if I will let him. Shall I do so? I could—if he were a member of the family."

The door closed and Grace was alone, surprised and rebellious. There she sat in the darkening room with clenched hands, without a word, without a movement, for some time, thinking. A little after six o'clock her step-mother returned, fearing to stay away longer, and found her sitting where she had left her.

"Cecily has gone to bed," she remarked sharply; "she seems rather worse to-night than usual. I am distracted about her and do not know what I shall do. To think that I should have so much anxiety in my days of decline! Poor me!"

She seldom alluded to her age, and when she did it was a sign that everything was out of gear. Generally speaking, age was a bugaboo to her, and she as young as anybody—or pretended that she was, which was all right as far as it went. Her endeavor was to be gay and bright and juvenile, and up to a certain point success crowned her efforts.

The girl rose and crossed the room like a person in a dream. She did not wish to stay in the same room with the woman. The pitying sigh just heard should, by all right, have come from her breast, but she never made

complaints. What was the use? If she did, no one, in that house at least, would pay the slightest attention to it, so it was as well.

"Where are you going? Blanche can get the supper ready by herself. You need not go to Cecily. She requests to be left to herself. And I want your company, strange as it may appear."

She resumed her seat with a bitter smile.

"Is it not most singular that your sister should prefer to be alone so much?" her step-mother said, lighting the lamp on the center-table; "I cannot fathom the cause of it. I almost think there is something I do not know at the bottom of this mystery. If I only had the clue to it!"

"And have you no idea what it is?" Grace asked with a tinge of contempt; "you who are so clever too!"

"No, I have not. Have you?"

"Ask Hue—"

She was on the verge of telling the secret, in a second the man's name would have been out, but she paused, and in that moment the door-bell was rung in a quick, determined way, which made her think of Duncan. It was just his manner.

Her step-mother laughed in sheer glee at the sound.

"Oh, my dear, I am positive that is for you!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands and rushing to the door; "I wager that is Duncan. What do you say? Come, a box of Huyler's caramels that it is! Ha! Ha!"

She rose to her feet, and trembled as she stood.

"You have betrayed me into this man's power," she said in a low voice; "you have sent for him."

"Well, what if I have? He is our friend in need. Mind what I have said to you about him!"

"I will not see him!"

"Oh, yes, you will, dear. Go upstairs and make yourself presentable, while I get a nice supper ready in honor of your betrothal. We will do everything to make life sunny for you, if you will but yield. There, there! Go up stairs, and make yourself pretty!"

The girl was crying and sobbing. Without another word she left the room.

Mrs. Larch received Duncan in her most radiant manner. She had won what was for her a great victory; she was going to be mother-in-law to a rich and generous man, who did not appear difficult to manage.

The future seemed happy at last.

VI

Up in a small room a girl sat thinking in the dark. Since Cecily's illness the girls had occupied single rooms, and now Grace was able to slip upstairs quietly and be alone for a few minutes. In those precious minutes she reviewed the past, studied the present, and as far as she could scanned the future. There had been little in the past; there was nothing in the present; and everything was promised in the future, as the wife of a wealthy man. Her home-life was far from being sweet; it never had been that at any time. She loved her sister, who did not care much for her; nobody did for that matter, except Adam Duncan. And such a change had come in their common life that it was impossible for her to go on in the old way, so perhaps her step-mother was correct in her views. She had better go away.

She got that far in her thinking, but no farther, for some one came to the door and knocked. She opened it, and found the negro maid in the passage.

"Miss say to come down," she said with a broad smile; "Mr. Duncan wants to see you."

"Very well, Blanche."

She lighted her lamp and bathed her face with lavender water, and smoothed her hair, but it was impossible to obliterate the signs of weeping.

She went slowly down stairs to the parlor.

Duncan was standing near the fire-place as she

entered, alone. It was probable he had been standing since his entrance, not as yet having gotten over his antipathy to the chairs of that room. He was exquisitely neat in his New York apparel, and looked affluent and distinguished among the lares and penates of the Larch menage.

"Grace!" he exclaimed in a low voice, opening his arms wide to receive her.

She stopped and hesitated; then went bravely up to him, and welcomed him with both hands outstretched instead.

"And you are going to say yes this time, are you not?" he said, taking her hands and drawing her close to him; "and we shall be happy ever after."

"You have come at Mrs. Larch's bidding, have you not?" she asked point-blank. And she always called her Mrs. Larch from that evening.

"Not exactly. She has been writing to me lately about Cecily and a Colorado trip."

"And did she not mention me at all?"

"Oh, yes, she mentioned you because she was anxious about you."

"Anxious about me!"

"Anxious as to what you were to do and what would become of you during their absence. I knew what would become of you, for I have not changed my mind. I love you as well if not better to-night than I did a month ago, and so I have come to try my luck once more. You must marry me. Do you not see that it is your destiny? We can marry immediately, and they may go where they will. So matters will be adjusted and everybody satisfied."

"You are to help them make the trip, I believe."

"Who told you that pretty story?"

"Mrs. Larch."

"Oh! Well—yes—a trifle. You know how fond I am of your sister. Let this be my Christmas box to her. It is too small a thing to be discussed by you and me."

"Mr. Duncan, may I be frank with you?"

"Of course you may. A wife ought to be frank with her husband, eh, dear?"

"You know how we are situated; you know how my father left us. And you have read my heart, and discovered that I am not happy at home. Your sympathies are awakened. You pity me."

"I love you, you mean."

"But pity begat it. Well, you are willing to marry me as I am. I know that you could marry far more advantageously, and I realize how unequal everything is between us. Do not interrupt me. Let me have my say out this time. I cannot rest unless I speak my mind. I am unhappy at home because I am not loved, and not wanted. I learn at last that I am of no use to these people; that I might just as well leave them. Instead of marrying me, will you not let me work—I mean aid me to do so?"

He laughed in a hearty way good to hear.

"No, indeed. I want you to be my wife—not a *protégée*. Now, permit some frankness on my part. I love you, and if you will be my wife I shall do everything to please you, and in time you will love me. You will become fond of your husband. I too see that you are a cypher in this household. I have known it for

some years, and I want to take you out of it, and give you all that you have missed thus far in life. I love you so much that I want you to have everything. Mrs. Larch has informed me of your desire to earn a livelihood on the stage, and I am less in sympathy than she is. No, I want to marry you, and nothing less is in my mind. Come, my dear, you will never regret your marriage, and I shall take care that you do not mind the change from Tenbrook. Let Mrs. Larch and Cecily spend the winter in Colorado, and later on, if you like, I will take you there to see them, or we can make an excursion to the old world. I will do anything you fancy, if you will but marry me and love me a wee bit. Dear Grace!"

There was an adorable light in the girl's eyes as he spoke, and seeing it made him bold. He took her into his arms as though he owned her and drew her close to his breast, kissing her, and then laying his cheek against hers.

"Love me," he whispered, "and we shall be happy."

For awhile they stood thus in silence, heart to heart.

"My dear girl!" he said presently; "we need not wait any length of time before we are married, need we? To-day is Wednesday. Shall we say to-day week? Do not deny me."

"That is as you wish. I am going to leave all to you."

"Then it shall be a week from to-day. And do not worry over preparations for the event. There is no time for formality even if I cared for it. And you—"

The door was opened and Mrs. Larch entered in her airy, graceful way. Seeing how matters stood, she

started back in counterfeit amazement and embarrassment, which was no doubt engaging from a certain point of view.

"I came to announce supper," she explained; "not to interrupt you in what seems a grave discussion. May I take part in it too? We might become eloquent, perhaps interesting, if we tried."

"The discussion is closed," Duncan said with a smile; "the matter is settled and your part is ready for you. Congratulations are the order of the evening, and we are waiting."

She screamed, ran up to her step-daughter and kissed her lightly on the forehead—it was just a mere, dainty touch—nothing more—then she went to him and extended her hand with an enchanting air.

"And so you two have agreed to be one! You give up freedom, single blessedness, to be joined together in holy matrimony! 'Two souls with but a single thought; two hearts that beat as one.' I do congratulate you and wish you every joy. Oh, how proud this occasion would have made Mr. Larch! He loved you, Mr. Duncan, and Grace dear was the apple of his eye."

Grace dear was irritated by all this, and she would gladly have left the room in order to avoid it, but she did not see the way clear to doing that. So she had to remain, and suffer, and endure. However, there was a bit of comfort in the fact that there comes an end to all things if one waits, and soon this insincere woman would pass out of her life, with all these airs and graces, foolish talk and *double entendres*—it was to be hoped, forever. It would be a delightful change never to see her again, and so her marriage with Mr. Duncan

had at least one element of charm in it, if nothing else.

"How surprised Cecily will be," the woman rattled on; "and delighted too! She has the greatest possible admiration for you, Mr. Duncan, and only this morning was saying that you were the ideal friend—our best friend in fact. We were enumerating your many beautiful kindnesses to us all these years. How glad she will be to know you are to marry our dear Grace! But I think that she and I have had our suspicions about your frequent visits to Tenbrook some time past. Do not think that you threw dust into our eyes. We saw you were matrimonially inclined."

He laughed and looked as though he enjoyed the talk. But then he was a man, and the general run of men relish this sort of thing, if they happen to be the hero of the occasion, and there never was a better-posted woman than Mrs. Larch in this respect.

"But supper is waiting," she said, suddenly darting from this fascinating subject; "and whether you are in love or not, I feel sure you will do justice to my fried oysters, my buttered toast, my coffee, my poached eggs, and my other delicacies. I have yet to see the man who is not equal to a nice meal however deeply in love or sorrow he may be."

She led the way to the dining-room laughing gayly at his protestations, leaving Grace to follow with her *fiancé*. The room was brilliantly illuminated, and the table was extremely well arranged for the occasion. At a glance the girl saw that, metaphorically, the best foot had been thrust forward. The finest linen and best table appointments they possessed were out in imposing array. In the centre of the board was a large

glass bowl filled with rose geranium leaves and flowers that represented the entire wealth of their few plants. Even the negro maid was prepared for the event, and stood resplendent in snowy apron and collar, smiling in the background.

"Cecily will not be with us," the hostess said, assigning the places, and arranging the coffee equipage, while the maid passed the fried oysters and Saratoga chips; "she is not well and she retired before she knew you were here. I shall be delighted to make a change for her as soon as possible."

"You can do so at once," Duncan said, with a smile for his *fiancée;* "it is settled, you know. Grace and I go away next Wednesday afternoon."

"So soon? This is a surprise. I do not see how it can be done by that time. Women, you know, must make any number of engagements with milliners and dressmakers preparatory to marriage."

"Grace is going to let all that go. There will be enough time for that work afterward, and you are aware how much better it can be done in New York. And she will want something to do, I daresay. My sister is there to help her, not to speak of myself."

"Oh! Well, then we can leave the day after, Thursday, and I may tell the doctor something definite about the house. He is anxious to get his patient here as early as possible."

And so the talk went on, Grace for the most part saying little. It was not necessary that she should make small talk when her step-mother was around, for that lady was an adept at this rare accomplishment, and moreover partial to the sound of her own voice.

She carried the supper through lightly, being in high spirits, and for once the girl ought to have been grateful to her, but gratitude is an unknown quantity nowadays —an uncertain thing at any time.

Presently she left them together—and dear, old Time, who does not wait on anybody, at last sent the man flushed and blissful away to his hotel to dream of what was before him, leaving the bride-elect alone. How many thanks mortals owe that same dear, old Time for gracious favors rendered!

The front door locked, the girl stood for a moment in the hallway, warm and rosy after the passionate embraces of her prospective husband. She still felt his arms about her, his lips on her face, his love-words ringing in her ears. She belonged to him; she felt that she was a part of him. She stood there thinking of this. Finally she roused herself; a clock was striking eleven. She waited for the final stroke, then extinguished the various lamps in the parlor and elsewhere, and sought her bedroom. To reach it she had to pass Cecily's, and to her amaze she found that that door was open and her sister not in bed. She was half-lying, half-sitting on the floor beside the window, and the pale light of the young moon lit up the outlines of her trim figure and lovely face. The clear, cold heavens stretched above, a mass of glittering stars, and she was gazing at them wistfully.

"What! Still up," Grace asked from the threshold; "Oh, how imprudent of you!"

"I was waiting for you. That man has gone at last. Have you not something to tell me? I have been waiting for that."

"Perhaps. But it might have been kept until morning."

"Mother was in here before she went to bed."

"I expected as much. I do not believe there is anything for me to tell you now."

"She told me—"

"That you may leave for Colorado next week, and that I am going to be Mrs. Adam Duncan?"

"Yes."

"Well, there is nothing to tell after all."

"So you will marry this man! It will be charming as the wife of a man whose income is $40,000 per annum. The possibilities of enjoyment in that case are dazzling."

"I knew you would be of that opinion."

"And to think that I fancied he was courting our mother! She is more suited to him than you—"

"But you see he wants me, and he is able to please himself. Such is the way of man."

"It is to be next week, and we are to leave home too at the same time. Dear, I have been quite well since mother told me this. The uncertainty I have endured of late relative to Huerfano Tejon has been too much for me. Now, I shall seek him, since he has forsaken me, and in far Colorado learn the truth."

"I do not think he has forsaken you. There is some mistake, depend upon it."

"It is three weeks since we parted, and in that long time I have not had a single sign. Is it not cruel?"

"No news is good news."

"But I shall go to him. If I did not see him soon—if he did not acknowledge our marriage—I should be

unable to live. I lied to you the day of my return from Hartford. I will tell you the truth. Bend your head down. *So*. I am afraid of the very walls."

After the whisper Grace stood up tall and straight. The heavens seemed colder, and the stars glittered in her eyes.

"It is time you went to Colorado, and found your husband. You have made a mistake, and the sooner it is rectified the better. Take my advice, tell your mother. She will be equal to managing the affair. In a fortnight you will meet Huerfano Tejon face to face, and all is well that ends well. You will be happy yet."

"Are you going? Kiss me good-night. I wish you a beautiful life as Mrs. Duncan."

"Good-night. I am tired of kissing. I think kissing a big humbug, really foolish. Excuse me, please—to-night."

"You are so cold, so proud; but perhaps you may undergo a change some day. You are stiff, irresponsive—a prude! Good-night."

Grace smiled under the reproof. Of course she was full of faults, that was well known by this time, and these same failings were held up to her every day of her life, and dwelt upon until she at last viewed them with indifference, half pitiful, half disdainful. Was it worth while to try to remedy them and make herself an *ignis ardens* in the petty world in which she moved? She did not think it was.

VII

"What is love? A ceaseless stream,
A changeless star, an endless dream,
A smiling flower that will not die,
A beauty, and a mystery.
Its storms as light as April showers,
Its joys as bright as April flowers,
Its hopes as sweet as summer air,
And dark as winter its despair."

At eleven o'clock the next day Cecily found herself in full possession of the parlor and the lounge. The weather had cleared off, fair, bracing, frosty, and Duncan and Grace were out for a lovers' ramble in those woods wherein he had declared his love a few weeks since. He had proposed the outing himself, because he wished to talk the future over with his bride-elect. without the presence and interruptions of the Larch family, and also because anything approaching intimate and loving talk in the crowded company room of the house, seemed to him practically out of the question. So at ten o'clock he came beaming with happiness and satisfaction, to ask for the walk. He looked so bright and handsome that Grace at once consented, and moreover went with a feeling of pleasure and pride. In many particulars he appealed to her, and there had always been that good fellowship between them which is the result of long acquaintance and tastes in common, and which, say what one will, is really a fair substitute

for the fever and delirium called love, because in the daily fret of life it wears infinitely better.

She admired his straight, strong figure invariably clothed in the best sartorial style, his expressive and cleanly-shaven face, and thick fair hair. There was nothing about him mean, or slovenly or commonplace. On the contrary he had a distinguished air and gave one the impression of ease and wealth at the first glance, as well as being every inch a man.

Mrs. Larch and Cicely were upstairs in the room of the latter watching the pair on their way to the woods.

"A splendid, bonny couple!" the former said with a laugh; "he is so fair and strong and she so dark. May good angels attend them, and Hymen keep watch too!"

"I am going out," she next announced; "on a foraging expedition, and Tenbrook will have to yield up to me its best to-day. We have a man on hand, my dear. And for three days I shall feed him well. I mean to get a strong hold on his regard. At the end of these three days he returns home to make arrangements for the home-bringing of the bride. He will not be back until Tuesday afternoon. I know Duncan is in love. It is as plain as the nose on your face. However, always bear in mind this sensible saying when dealing with the male biped:

"But man is a carnivorous production
And must have meals—at least one meal a day;
He cannot live, like woodcocks, upon suction,
But, like the shark and tiger, must have prey."

After that sally she went forth with malicious pleasure to brave and harass the village butchers and green

grocers, a process in which she stood without a single rival.

Not long after her departure, Cecily sought the parlor, which early in the morning had been put in order for the benefit of Duncan and Grace, and gave up the upper regions to the care of the negro maid, whom through closed doors she could hear vigorously sweeping and beating to a mournful singing of " I'm a rolling through this troublesome world."

She stretched herself on the lounge with a faint smile, first propping the silken pillows at her head and back. The smile was due to an item she had read in the morning newspaper she held in her hand ready for future perusal as soon as she was comfortably placed, which said that the pillow was the reigning society fad; that it had always been a favorite, especially with the man who has to make the fire and hates to get up; but now society women have gone daft over it. The watchword is " Lounge! " and they do it to the queen's taste. Hence one sees more divans and these are loaded down with the softest of pillows, of all shades of silk, satin or light plush, their cost enhanced by clouds of filmy lace. Upon these my lady reclines at leisure and dreams the hours away in supreme content feeling that she is enjoying comfort. She read it over again, for it struck her as both amusing and *àpropos*.

The door-bell rang. She listened to the maid coming down the stairs and opening the door, but without curiosity. Her mother no doubt had returned for something she probably had forgotten on going out.

The parlor door was flung back softly. She looked up and saw Huerfano Tejon standing on the threshold

with a smile! She covered her face with her hands as though to shut out the sight of him.

Tejon noticed the unwelcoming gesture, and ran forward, threw himself on his knees by the lounge, and impetuously folded her in his arms. He seemed to love her dearly, if manner counts.

"What! you are not glad to see me?" he cried with reproach; "and we have been so long apart too. Take your hands down and look me straight in the face, and say you are glad to see me again. Cruel Cecily! Is this the way to receive me?"

She did not obey orders.

"Cruel Huerfano, you mean," she said instead, and through her fingers.

"No, I do not. You have treated me abominably."

Down the hands fell at that and she tried to push him from her, but without succeeding. He held her even tighter than before—if possible.

"I have longed for this meeting, and how you welcome me! Have you forgotten the past—what we have been to one another? Remember Hartford."

"I have not forgotten, but you have apparently. Did I deserve the treatment I received at your hands? Tell me what you think I ought to have had from you. I should like to know your estimate of such things."

He laughed in her rosy, angry face, and clasped her hands tightly in his, and swung them to and fro as children do.

"I will not be blamed till I have rendered an explanation. After that you may frown and scold me as much as you like. But you cannot be really angry with me, for we are far too dear to one another, are we not?"

She averted her head and looked across the room at the " Angelus " on the easel, determining to punish him with unfriendly gaze and reticence, as he most justly deserved for what he had done.

A low, amused laugh and a lingering kiss were the only rewards for her pains.

" You are so pretty in anger," he whispered, laying his cheek to hers; " sweetheart, I love you. I like to see you so."

Then with tenderness he added this:

" You have been ill. I see a change in you. What has been the matter? "

Her mouth quivered at the corners—her eyes clouded with tears—she longed to throw herself upon his breast and weep away the heaviness, the disappointment of the past three weeks, but she thought better of the impulse, and still refused to speak to him. Had he not been unkind to her? He ought to be punished.

He put his arms around her and pressed her face to his.

" There; now tell me what has been the matter. I know you have been ill. Your face is tell-tale."

She began to sob.

" I have been ill, most anxious, and full of longing for you. But I am happy now. How good it is to be with you again! Yes, hold me so; it gladdens my whole being."

Some time passed in silence while he caressed and soothed his wife.

" Do you not wish to hear what I have to say in explanation? " he asked after awhile, but not moving. " Yes? As soon as I reached Colorado I attended to

all the funeral arrangements of my dear uncle, then I was compelled to go to Aspen and Trinidad because of certain unexpected developments in my mining interests in those places. On my return to Colorado Springs I had two real estate deals on hand that prevented my coming east at once for you as I intended. However, the moment this was adjusted I left. In Chicago I had to see three men who would not be put off till the return trip, and that detained me a few days more. That is all."

"You are quite an expert in making excuses."

"Are you not satisfied?"

"Not exactly. But I begin to comprehend what is before me. Tell me, pray, why you never wrote me. Surely you can explain that too."

"I did write."

"Oh!"

"I did."

"Every day?"

"Every day—or nearly. And besides that I sent you various dispatches from time to time."

"Of course you did!"

"I was furious at the way you treated me. You never sent me a line, and my letters and dispatches were ignored. It is I that should be angry, wounded and resentful—not you, dearest."

"I expected that you would blame me. Yes, I have no doubt but that I am the culprit. Women are always in the wrong."

"I was deeply pained at such unkind treatment."

"And you are waiting for me to apologize, I daresay."

"I think you might show that you are really sorry."

"But I am not. I have nothing for which to be sorry. I have done nothing to hurt your feelings."

"No?"

"Nothing. It is you who have been cruel and unkind. I never heard from you. The first ten days I was ill in bed with typhoid fever, and on my recovery I went to the postoffice and inquired for letters, but there were none. After that I began writing to you, sometimes twice a day. And yet you come here and play the rôle of the injured one. It is contemptible."

Tejon gave her a hug and laughed.

"You are a dear, dear simpleton," he said; "I see I am going to have a warm time of it with you. Feel in my breast pocket, you silly girl."

She would not, but kissed him on the eyes instead.

"Feel, and obtain the explanation of this mystery."

He forced her hands into the pockets and made her take therefrom several packages of letters. There were over twenty letters addressed to Mrs. Huerfano Tejon, Tenbrook, Massachusetts, various telegrams all marked "unknown" or "uncalled for," and a second package addressed to Mr. Huerfano Tejon, Colorado Springs, Colorado, which was stamped with "To be forwarded to Tenbrook, Massachusetts." The first package was in his chirography, the second in hers, and none of the letters had been opened and read as yet.

"What do you say now? Did I not write every day? As soon as I reached Tenbrook, which was late last night, I saw the telegraph operator and learned from him that he had been unable to find Mrs. Huerfano Tejon, and this morning I also learned the same

thing at the post-office. There was no one of that name here. At the hotel I found your letters, with others, forwarded from Colorado as I had given orders. I have not read one of them yet, you see."

"I asked at the post-office for letters for Mrs. Huerfano Tejon, as well as Miss Cecily Larch."

"But did you write out the name or pronounce it?"

"I spoke it."

"Well, you might have known they would never be any the wiser. I had to write it out before your stupid postmaster could get it into his noddle. After that it was clear sailing. The letters have accumulated there and have even been advertised. I never dreamed that any effusion of mine could receive such cavalier treatment as this. Oh, what a joke this is, to be sure!"

And he laughed until he was red in the face.

"And fancy that I have written to your mother—"

"What?"

"Asking where you were and what had become of you."

"But I have told her nothing. She does not know that we are married."

"I did not tell you not to let her know. I think you should have told your mother and prepared her for me. I shall be afraid to meet her now. I informed my people and they are delighted at my having a wife. A warm welcome is awaiting you in Colorado."

"Do not fear my mother. She will rejoice to see me happy, and as for the rest—I mean as to liking you—there can be no question at all. I will vouch for that."

"May I see her now? The sooner we get the ordeal

over the better for all of us. I shall not then have this miserable quaking sensation that annoys me. Is she at home?"

"No, had she been, you would not have enjoyed so excellent an opportunity of making your peace with me, sir. She is out marketing, but I look for her any moment."

As she finished speaking they heard somebody enter the house.

"It is she," his wife said.

Tejon proposed that they should stand facing the door, arm in arm, and together meet her so.

"Are you scared? she laughed, nestling close to him.

Unprepared her mother entered a few moments later, untying her bonnet strings as she came. At the sight before her she paused abruptly, colored, and let her bonnet-strings alone. For a full minute the three eyed each other in silence.

"What does this mean?" she asked, being the first to recover; "who is this gentleman?"

The daughter was afraid to answer, so looked at her husband.

"I am Huerfano Tejon, of Colorado Springs," he said for her.

"Are you indeed? Well, go on, I am no wiser for the information."

"I am your daughter's husband too—your son-in-law."

Mrs. Larch gasped, and unable to stand, sank into the nearest chair, limp and helpless.

"Yes," the girl chimed in; "he is my husband. We

were secretly married at Hartford three weeks ago."

"*Ingrate!*" her mother said in an angry voice.

"Do not scold her, but blame me. I urged her to take the step." And he explained the matter in brief and matter-of-fact man fashion.

"I believe you are out of your mind," Mrs. Larch said as he concluded; "both of you. I never knew anything quite as ridiculous as this. And so, Cecily, this is what has changed you and puzzled me so much? I begin to see at last."

She nodded her head and laughed at her mother.

"She intended to let me tell you. I was to be in Tenbrook within ten days after her return, and so she waited. I did not come; she fell ill; time passed. I was detained by various urgent business matters. After that she was somewhat afraid of you."

"Now I see why you wished to go to Colorado. And I recall this gentleman's name. You told us about his being in Hartford when you were there, but I did not know he was from the far west, or if you told me, I must have forgotten it. Well, I must make the best of it, I see, and offer my congratulations."

"You must forgive and forget, dear mother, and love my husband for my sake. I love him, and am happy now he has come back to me."

"Men are men; the best sometimes forget. That is what the bard of Avon said, and he meant women too. I see how happy you are, Cecily. Kiss me. Mr. Tejon, you may kiss me also."

He obeyed in a frank and manly way.

"I never was happier in my life," he said gayly; "family ties agree with me. And you must know that

I have been a thorough bachelor. But I am totally reformed now. However, happy as I am, there is still something on my mind. Allow me to ask, Mrs. Larch, if you have been to the post-office this morning?"

"Yes, I have been there. Some one must go once a day."

"Did you get any letters?"

"Yes, quite a number. They are in my pocket. I have had no time to read them yet."

"Two are from me and you need not read them. Oblige me by destroying them, please."

"Here they are," she said, sorting them out, and handing them to him; "my amiability is, as you see, greater than my curiosity."

"Thank you. They are tedious letters asking why I did not hear from my wife, and really not worth your reading, but some day I shall write you far more entertainingly if I have the chance."

"You will find that I am unsatiable concerning letters. But we shall discuss the matter later on. I must leave you to the tender mercies of Cecily, because I am the high priestess of the kitchen. Of course you dine with us. I can discount any effort the Tenbrook hotel may make in the culinary line, I assure you."

"And you will become acquainted with your future brother-in-law," the young wife put in—"Mr. Adam Duncan, of New York, is here. Grace and he are engaged, and their wedding takes place next Wednesday. You have arrived on the scene in the nick of time, for you shall give the bride away, being the male representative of the family." And she clapped her hands in childish glee, and laughed in her old way.

"In the meantime," Mrs. Larch said, about to leave the room; "you had better tell Mr. Tejon all about the western trip. Married people must not have secrets from each other. I used to make my husband tell me every thing, and he and I were cited far and near as a devoted couple. Married life is all right, if you manage it in the proper way."

The next moment she left the room, and they were alone with their happiness, which was still a wonder and a glory to both of them.

VIII

My dear Miss Larch:

My brother has just returned home, and we have had a delightful, confidential chat. It was one of those rare, but charming family talks that illumine the often monotonous daily round.

I have been informed what is to occur next Wednesday forenoon. Hymen is to light his torch once again and wait on you. I immediately avail myself of this opportunity to waive ceremony and write you a letter. Accept my hearty and sincere congratulations.

Pardon me for saying that the announcement of my brother's approaching marriage is a great surprise. Indeed I am not sure that I have quite recovered yet. Bear in mind, however, the many years that Adam has walked through life in single blessedness, and, as I innocently supposed, fancy free, and you will admit that the surprise is but a matter of course.

We have remarked his frequent absences from home, but since he is a man, and we are given to understand that there were business matters in Boston of an important nature that must be attended to, why it was beyond our poor powers of divination to see Tenbrook and Cupid on the way. This is but another instance of the remarkably elastic nature of business matters abroad. But believe me the surprise aforesaid is in no sense unpleasant. We are truly happy because you two are happy. By we, I mean myself and Elsie, my little

daughter. It would be unkind and certainly selfish if we did not cheerfully enter into any arrangement near to Adam's heart. And this one must be very near. He has been so good, so kind, so generous to us. Without him I do not know what would have happened. Perhaps you have heard that my life has been more or less checkered. But you can never realize all that it was. I am one of the silly American girls who marry titles. I am now at home without husband, money or home, a dependent on my brother and, disagreeable as such a situation might be to some, I am only too thankful for that dear shelter and peace. When you have suffered almost every form of degradation it is good to be at peace again. No one is to blame for my misfortune but myself. I would marry my high-bred gentleman, in spite of everything that was said and done to prevent it. And if everybody was right and I alone wrong, why my fault is all the more evident. After every effort to dissuade me from taking a step which appeared most hazardous to him, Adam yielded, and for love of me made the marriage possible. I received at his hands a handsome *dot*—and a titled husband. I ought to have been happy, for I loved the man and everything about him. I was fool enough to think that he loved me. It took nine years to convince me that he did not, and in that time I endured what I thought was exceptional wretchedness. However, I find that many wives have similar experiences, whether their lords are titled or not. A man is a man, call him patrician or plebeian. You will wonder why I write you thus. For two reasons: I want you to know what a good man Adam is, and also certain points about myself. It is

better to get them first-hand than from any outside source. Nine wretched years passed, and then Adam came to the rescue, and I obtained my release. My money was gone, and there was no prospect of more, so the matter was quickly and easily adjusted. Adam brought Elsie and me home. Let me tell you there never lived a better man, a dearer friend, a more generous and loyal brother. Consider yourself a most fortunate girl in winning such a husband. He will make you a blessed wife.

His home is mine; I hope it will continue to be mine. I trust that you will like me well enough to permit me to remain. I have no other home. I shall try to win your love and esteem. As soon as you enter the house I shall of course abdicate in your favor, relinquishing all rights vested in me as the nominal head of the same. My place is now necessarily secondary. Do not for a second imagine that this will be disagreeable to me in any respect. I assure you that it is not. You will be the mistress, and you should assume your proper place at once on your arrival. The house is commodious. Elsie and I are allotted a suite of rooms quite apart from the rest of the general household, where we are most comfortable, and reign supreme. Surely that ought to be sufficient for a dependent woman, if she is reasonable. And I flatter myself I am at least that—if nothing else.

There is no reason why we should not be a harmonious household. There can be no doubt of your liking Elsie and me. We have a wide reputation for being charming. Do you think this egotism? It is the simple truth—no doubt!

I do not regard you as a total stranger. You may not be aware that I knew your father slightly, but enough for admiration, and that I have heard a good deal about your family from time to time. I have always desired the pleasure of your acquaintance. My life in Europe has prevented the formation of friendships in America. However, the European part is over forever; I have excellent opportunities now. I look forward to seeing you with genuine interest, and I promise you a cordial welcome to New York. Were it possible I would be present at the wedding ceremony. Will you accept a small gift from Elsie and me? I got it in Florence ten years ago when I was young, simple, gay, light-hearted. I have worn it but twice, once at the opera when *I promessi Sposi* was being sung—the night I fell in love with my title—and again on my betrothal. I could go to Tiffany's and buy you a costlier present, but there would be no associations, and what are presents without them? To me—nothing. This bauble lay, a hundred years ago, in the jewel casket of a beautiful Contessina who loved, like myself, not wisely but too well. I will tell you its history some day, providing you care to hear a tale of woe.

With many kind wishes, believe me,

Sincerely yours,

LELIA AUS DER SCHLOGL.

Madison Square, 3 November.

The gift accompanying the letter was a collarette of silver filagree, exquisitely made, and studded with pearls and turquoises—a rare, old jewel that spoke of a rich and remote past.

IX

WEDNESDAY came, and with it the clearest sky and brightest sunshine. Old Sol intended to rejoice on this wedding day, if never again. And oh, how shabby and poor he made the little Larch parlor look! All the cheapness and foolishness came out more prominently than ever under the golden rays of light. The flowers placed in the various unoccupied spots were not able to divert attention from the decorative monstrosities and the wholesale pretense.

However, Mrs. Larch and Cecily were resplendent in new gowns and jewels. The former was extremely pretty and, as she thought irresistible, in an expensive gown of cream-colored cloth, her fluffy brown hair charmingly arranged, and every diamond on, and in constant sparkle too.

Cecily had regained her looks, and was radiant. Tejon had accomplished this, and he was quite at home in the family. His high spirits were contagious, and the house rang with his voice and his laugh. The very atmosphere palpitated with his presence. There had been a rush, a go, a magnetic glow about everything from the time he entered the house, which no one could resist, even if so disposed. And certainly nobody in the small group desired to be churlish. The world loves a lover, and these people were no exception to that pleasant rule. Tejon loved with frankness and fervor and abandon. And the blush, the glamour, of the first

stage of wedded love shone on and over him and radiating forth, touched all that were near, even Grace, and the negro maid of all work.

Cecily loved him, Mrs. Larch loved him and pampered him in every imaginable way, her usual method with the male species, and everybody was looking on and listening; consequently in that atmosphere the young husband yielded to love without a struggle. It was his mood, his pleasure, to be open, demonstrative, and when a handsome man is that his love talk and acts are beautiful and engaging.

Now he stood, at high noon, in the centre of that woman's room, tall, slim, straight-limbed, with a dazzling light in his dark eyes, a warm glow in the southern face, a peculiarly attractive something emanating from his happy presence, for which it is hard to find a suitable definition, with the bridal couple to the right of him and the Reverend Cyprian Raleigh in front. In the background stood Mrs. Larch, Cecily, a few old and intimate friends, and the smiling negro maid. The brightest person in the room, however, was the young man who was to give the bride away.

The bridegroom was perfection as to linen and clothes, and looked happy, though unusually quiet and dignified. Evidently he took the situation in its most serious phase. What he was engaged in partook of the nature of a sacrament. As he stood there apparently listening to what the presbyter said, he reviewed his life, and thought of the future—thought of what he ought to be to the woman beside him, and what she was going to be to him—of the mysterious union of which they were to be the component parts—of the

sacredness, the beauty, and the tenderness of marriage —of the perfected happiness in the double life and of the dear possibilities that were before him—with an honest, manly prayer to God that as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together so he and Grace might be blessed, and surely perform and keep the vow and covenant there betwixt them made.

And the bride? She was lost—leagues and leagues away from her surroundings—in a dream, scarcely knowing what was being said or done. She stood there as though in a trance, her head slightly bent, her eyes fastened on the rug before them, listening, but not understanding.

That day the associated press telegraphed to every part of the country, which no doubt was consumed by a fever of desire for information of this particular marriage, full details of the bridegroom, his appearance, age, business and wealth, each point more or less exaggerated, and also about the bride, adding that she wore a Blitzen traveling gown of smooth, fine pearl gray cloth embroidered in silver and made with a jacket of the same material, and further that a small round hat of gray touched with white and silver was raised above her closely-coiled and braided hair, and that she carried a bouquet of white orchids and lilies of the valley.

In reality she had not as yet arrived at the Blitzen stage of civilization; she stood there as the village dressmaker had turned her out for the occasion, but of course the jaded public must have the best imaginative power of Jenkins at all times.

The ceremony was over. They were man and wife in the presence of God and men. The Rev. Mr.

Raleigh said his neat formula that had done duty for twenty years, and stepped aside. Duncan kissed Grace with a strange, deep light in his clear gray eyes. That glance made her realize what had happened more than anything else, and under it she trembled. She was his! Maidenhood was behind her, never to return.

A ripple of congratulation broke out on all sides of her, to which the husband responded in a gallant fashion, admirable in its way. She hardly heard what was said. Presently she came to herself: someone was saying it was time to take leave, for their train would soon be due.

In a quick, nervous manner she kissed her stepmother and sister, and ran out of the room, out of the house, to the carriage in waiting, leaving her husband to follow. With a laugh he bade everyone a ceremonious good-by, not even omitting the maid. The next moment he was seated beside his wife, holding her hand, and the driver was whipping the horses as they rushed away.

"Why do you not look back?" he cried; "see, there they are at the window kissing their hands to us." And he kissed his in return.

"I do not wish to do so," she answered; "I have said farewell. And I never look back, if I can help it. Blanche would tell you that it is unlucky to look back."

Yes, she had said farewell to her old home in Tenbrook—she would never see it again—save in dreamland. She had uttered the eternal adieu.

Mrs. Larch laughed gayly as the carriage rattled out of sight, and in her airiest manner quoted dear, old Dickens, paraphrasing somewhat to suit the occasion:

" ' So, she leaning on her husband's arm, they drove homeward by a rosy path which the gracious sun struck out for them in its setting. And O there are days in this life, worth life and worth death. And O what a bright, old song it is, that O 'tis love, 'tis love, 'tis love, that makes the world go round!' "

X

THE newly-made benedict had engaged corner seats in the palace car for himself and bride, in order to obtain as much seclusion as possible under the circumstances. The car was filled with the usual well-dressed and distinguished-looking men and women seen traveling between New York and Boston at certain hours of the day. Complete privacy was of course out of the question, but under cover of the gay talk and laughter on every side a reasonable degree of it was possible.

"I could not get the drawing-room," he said, as soon as they were seated; "it was taken in Boston by the *prima ballerina* of the opera and she, her maid, and her dog are in there now."

"This will do. I enjoy watching people, and no one suspects us—apparently. We shall reach New York without receiving impertinent attention. These people are well-bred."

He nestled closer to her, and looked deep into her eyes. It was the husband's glance.

"I am so happy," he said softly; "little did I dare to dream a month ago, when traveling over this road, that I should soon make the trip again with you as my wife. Oh, Grace, the present and the future are indeed sunlit and full for you and me."

She looked at him with a smile.

"I shall do everything in my power to please you," she said demurely.

"That will be an easy matter. You have only to love me—a little bit. That is all."

"Is it love me little, love me long?"

"Yes."

A pause.

She did not care for small talk just then; she desired rather to be silent, to think, to realize in some measure the present situation, if she could. He, however, was of a different mind, being in a talkative mood, so she put her own inclination aside, and humored him.

"Talk to me," she said.

"What about?"

"Any thing. I have no choice."

He laughed at her.

"Suppose I tell you something of your future home? You have asked few questions concerning it, and you have never been in New York any length of time. Are you not afraid to enter a household where everything is unfamiliar, of which you know nothing?"

"No, you will be beside me. And why should I fear? Besides everything is not unfamiliar to me. Have I not heard of you and your home all my life? I am not afraid. Still, you may tell me about it, if you please, so that I may be prepared for any strangeness awaiting me there."

"We live on North Madison Square, and —"

"Pardon my interrupting you, but explain what is comprised under that pronoun."

"My sister, her little girl and myself."

"Lelia Aus der Schlogl and Elsie? I had a charming

letter from your sister the other day, welcoming me into the family. I will show it to you when my trunk is unpacked. But proceed."

"Our house is a large double building not exactly in the present ultra fashionable quarter, but most convenient and select, nevertheless. The surroundings are attractive at all seasons, and in a few minutes' walk one is in the thick of the life of the metropolis. To me this compensates for much that is to be found in Seventy-second street, upper Fifth avenue, or on the Riverside drive. I have a pardonable fondness for my home, and I have every reason to believe that you will like it fully as much as I do, in time. In such a house naturally the housekeeping lines are broad, and no doubt somewhat different to those to which you are accustomed."

"In what way?"

"The house is in charge of an experienced housekeeper, whom I have had for years. In that direction you will be relieved of every care. We have a butler, who with the assistance of a parlor maid, rules the dining-room, wine cellar, and the first floor of the house. An experienced cook, two maids and the coachman are the other servants. These are as many as I care to contend with, and, though my sister thinks there should be one or two more, I have thus far remained obdurate. I tried a valet for a time, but soon got rid of him, for he was a superfluity, and I found that he wore my clothes oftener than I did myself. Lelia has a maid, a companion, or nursery governess—I scarcely know her exact status. You of course may add any you deem necessary to your comfort."

"There are enough servants for me to think of," Grace said, laughing; "you know our small menage in Tenbrook, therefore comparisons are odious, as the bard of Avon says. There will be nothing for me to do, but enjoy myself in the new home!"

"Just that, and be the head of the same. Believe me that is no easy position to fill. All day there will be questions that only you can answer, orders to be given, matters to adjust, but you are equal to anything that may arise in the household. You will find that though you have efficient servants, there must necessarily be a supervision of the whole, an interest in the smallest details, else there will be discomfort, and insubordination in your realm."

"You do not frighten me."

"I do not wish to do so—only to warn. Mrs. Eager is an admirable housekeeper, and requires no watching or directing, but she will submit everything to your consideration, from the *menu* of each meal to the smallest laundry item, before acting on her own responsibility. She knows precisely what is the need of the matter in hand, but submits everything to the head of the house as a mark of right and deference. You could turn over the entire control to her with confidence—only she will not let you. We have tried it, and failed."

"Tell me something of your sister. I am confident Mrs. Eager and I shall agree."

"Lelia graduated from Rutgers College, New York, and went abroad for recreation and further study with an aunt of ours, who is now dead. She met Max Aus der Schlogl, an Austrian noble, at Florence. He fol-

lowed her over the continent, and impetuously besieged her. She foolishly married him. You may recall the notoriety the wedding aroused. This marriage was a failure—of course. He wanted her money, and he got it. Four years ago he was willing to agree to a divorce, because the money was spent, and to give up Elsie. We do not know what has become of him since, and we do not care."

"Is your sister a pretty woman, or 'a daughter of the gods divinely tall and most divinely fair?'"

"She is tall and fair, intellectual, clever, tactful, and universally admired."

"And Elsie?"

"She is eight years old and pretty of course, coming from handsome parents. You will love her at once."

The listener smiled dubiously. She rarely liked people at first sight; before she could feel genuinely friendly regard for others she had to know them intimately for some time.

"I hope so. Have you told them all about me? It will not be pleasant if we disagree. There must be harmony in the family nest, if nowhere else."

"You will like Lelia, and of course there will be harmony."

He said it in a way that implied the impossibility of not admiring his sister.

"For she is a lovely woman," he added; "and Elsie is an interesting youngster."

Grace was on the point of speaking when she happened to glance down the car, and saw a handsome young man coming towards them with the intention of speaking either to herself or to her husband. There

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could be no doubt about it. He was looking straight at them and smiling in a radiant, irresistible way. The tall, well-built figure was clothed in faultless style, and of all the favored people in the car he was without question the most distinguished. It must be admitted that she actually stared at him. A man with perfect face and form is not seen every day, therefore she may be pardoned the indiscretion. The stranger came up to Duncan, laughing.

"Why, my dear fellow," he cried with extended hand, and eyeing Grace with curiosity; "how jolly this is! I had no idea you were on the train. I did not see you get on. Are you returning home? If I had known you were here I should not have lingered in the smoking-room."

"I am homeward bound. And you?"

"I too. I was at your house last week. Lelia—Mrs. Aus der Schlogl, told me that you had gone to Boston on urgent business. We wondered what it could possibly be."

The husband colored.

"I have been in Boston on urgent business. Lelia was correct in her statement. Can you guess it, you who are so quick-witted? Let me see if you are clever at guessing."

The gentleman knitted his fine eyebrows, and put on a puzzled expression.

"I do not unravel riddles," he said; "and I see from the look in your eyes that this is a stupendous one. Have mercy on me and tell me what mysterious thing you have done in Boston. I dare say you are in some big deal or other. In this day of trusts and

syndicates one can scarcely foretell what will happen next. If you are making heaps of money why not let me into the scheme?"

"You do not know how to read the mysterious. Know then that I am this day a married man. Pray allow me to make you acquainted with my wife. Grace, I have the pleasure of presenting to you Mr. Chauncey Don, an old and valued friend."

The gentleman stood in the passage surprised into confusion, man of the world though he was. He made an effort to say a few words of greeting and felicitation, but it was a lamentable failure. Grace laughed at his comical embarrassment, and the men joined her in it, after a slight pause, most heartily.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Duncan," she said; "and if you are an old, dear friend of my husband's I trust you will grow friendly towards me in the course of time. You are too surprised now to be anything else."

"I assure you I never was more astonished than this before. Let me explain myself. I was told nothing about this. Lelia nagged me last week, and hinted at some event in which we were mutually interested that would soon occur. I had no idea it was anything of this nature. I was to be at your house to-morrow evening in order to be surprised. We had arranged the whole thing; indeed we have a bet up. And I win; for now I am in the wonderful secret."

"May we know the bet?" Duncan asked, and she fancied he was displeased, though neither voice nor face expressed it.

"Oh, a supper at Del—'s, nothing more and nothing less."

"Who is Del?" Grace asked, thus betraying herself.

"Delmonico," he answered with an amused glance; "we shall have to introduce you to him—or rather his place—as early as practicable."

"Suppose we go some evening this week?" Duncan put in immediately; "after the play, I think will be most enjoyable. If you come to the house to-morrow evening we can decide upon the theatre and time. Dine with us."

"Very well. But it is delightfully absurd to be making engagements with you and your wife. I do not realize the fact of your marriage at all. It seems as though I were simply chatting with old acquaintances and that you are still the same. How did you manage the business? I thought you and I were impervious to matrimony, and were totally lacking in the necessary courage."

"My step in this direction must surely be an incentive to you, and when I tell the story you will hesitate no longer about following my example. Your bachelorhood is at its close."

"'That's best which God sends. 'Twas His will; it is mine,'" Don quoted with a laugh.

"You put it so, but we know that you are a bachelor from sheer maliciousness. However, the end of that is at hand, and I for one am wickedly glad."

"Of course; that is to be expected from you, now that you are no longer single and free."

"I see Mr. Don goes on the Shakespearean maxim," Grace said lightly, though at heart she was not pleased with the talk; "'A young man married is a young man marred.'"

"But I am not a young man," her husband rejoined; "so nobody can apply that to me."

"Well, let us make the best of the situation," the other said with airy grace; "you are old and married; Mrs. Duncan is a woman and married; I am a young man unmarried and unmarred as yet. It is a clear case for each of us of: 'doant meet trubbles hauf way, for thare not wurth t' compliment.'"

This way of putting the matter provoked merriment, and from that time on, until they reached New York, badinage was the order of the occasion, and consequently our group in the car corner was a lighthearted one indeed.

In the rush and roar and confusion which met them on alighting in the Grand Central depot a liveried servant approached Duncan, and informed him that the *coupé* was in waiting outside.

"This is your coachman Ogden," Duncan said to his wife, at the same time giving the man their trunk checks and directing him to the porter who stood back of them loaded down with portmanteaux and wraps. And out of the rush and roar and confusion she was led to the brilliant light and deafening traffic beyond, where a *coupé* and horse stood to receive her. Duncan put her in, and followed himself. Don stood at the door laughing and chatting until the coachman came, then bade them good-by, and called a hansom. The next moment they separated, each going in a different direction.

XI

THE drive from the station to the house was so rapid and the life of the street through which they went so bewildering that Grace was unable to observe anything in particular, though she was excited and interested to an unusual degree concerning the city which was to be her future home. And above this purely personal feeling was yet another—strange, indefinable, but fascinating—that which every new-comer experiences on entering rich, brilliant, stirring New York for the first time. Block after block of stately homes, with here and there an imposing church rising skyward, and smart people going and coming on each side of the way passed quickly before her eyes and deepened in her an eager, impressed attention. She promised herself that when she had leisure to do so she would explore this passage again, and give herself the pleasure of a more careful, and hence gratifying, observation.

At last the *coupé* stopped. Duncan jumped out. They were in front of a substantial double house of brown stone. On the opposite side was Madison square, which even in the cold light of an afternoon in early winter appeared attractive. Beyond, tall, white hotels reared their heads, and through the leafless trees of the square one could see a dense mass of people and vehicles moving. And over all came the deep, mysterious sound of a great city—that song unlike all other songs, and which seems never done.

Unmindful of passers-by he caught her by the hand, and hurried up the broad flight of stone stairs.

"This is our home," he said with a laugh and a significant look; "let us enter it hand in hand. A fig for convention! Dear wife, we are at home."

With quickened nerves, and an exquisite rose tint in her face, but perfect outward composure, she stood at the rich threshold of her new home with him, awaiting admission thereto.

In answer to the loud ring the door was, after awhile, slowly opened. An imposing, clerical-looking man in black stood in the hallway with a very shadow of a smile, which might, or might not, have been intended as a greeting. It seemed a piece of impertinence to regard this well-dressed, well-appearing dignitary with his churchly air in the light of a common, every-day menial, but such he was in reality. He was Whiteacre, the butler.

Duncan brushed past him into the wide, handsome hallway with that indifferent, superior manner that some people reserve for servants, but his wife had a kind heart. She bowed and smiled to the personage, who looked as though he was about to pronounce a benediction.

"Where is Mrs. Aus der Schlogl?" Duncan asked in the off-hand way that goes with the indifferent, superior manner alluded to; "is she in? Go tell her that we are here—that your future mistress and I are in the reception-room. And as soon as the luggage comes have it at once carried to Mrs. Duncan' dressing-room."

Possibly the butler did incline his slick, smooth head

a quarter of an inch in recognition of the orders, but one could not be quite sure of it. She watched him go with dignified tread, and admired his figure and manner. Yes, he was in charge of a wealthy parish, and now he had gone into the vestry—and here she smiled at her nonsensical notions, and dismissed them.

Her husband turned to the left and caught a velvet portiere in his hand.

"Here," he said, drawing it aside and revealing a lovely terra cotta interior, "is the reception-room, and our favorite. It is used more than any other room in the entire house. To the right is the drawing-room. That extends the full depth of the building. We think it too stiff and grand for anything save ceremony, and so we use it but rarely. Come!"

She stepped into the reception-room with him. The portiere fell into place.

He took her into his arms and, holding her so, kissed her with a husband's ardor.

"I love you—I love you!" he murmured, looking into her eyes; "dear heart!"

The room was all terra cotta and pale blue, with here and there a touch of gold; Subdued, rich, everything was in perfect taste. The walls were covered with paintings of the best modern schools and the *bric-à-brac* was of the kind worth having. There was no pinchbeck and Brummagen visible. In one of the corners, against a terra cotta velvet background gleamed the white beauty of a Pysche, the value of which would have twice bought out that Tenbrook menage, of painful memory.

"Do you admire the room?" he asked, noting the

wandering glance, and thereupon releasing his wife, reluctantly.

"Very much—of course."

He could say no more, for they heard the sound of hurrying feet, of eager, childish feet, coming down the stairs with the half skip peculiar to children.

"Elsa Aus der Schlogl!" he announced with a laugh, and then he sighed.

The portiere was dashed aside and a small, lovely child ran in with a shout. She was arrayed in a quaintly-made Greenaway gown of black surah with white muslin bodice and big puffed sleeves. A clever, pretty child she was, after pictures of children of the eighteenth century. Her hair was dark brown, her eyes looked black, and the face was regular in all its lines.

"Oh—h—h!" she screamed, rushing to Duncan, and literally throwing herself at him; "I am so glad—so glad—to see you, lieber Herr Onkel! Kiss me! Again. Again. And yet again! That is so good."

He obeyed manfully.

"Do not tell," she continued, and Grace noticed the precise way of pronouncing the words, as though she were not at home in the vernacular; "I did escape. I ran away from the gouvernante and Frau Mama. They said I must be *vornehm*. I do not know the word in English. But I ran off when they were not watching. You are back for all time now—eh? I do love you, Onkel Adam."

He permitted her to run on, with an occasional caress. By and by, however, she realized that there was someone else in the room. She looked round at Grace with unconcern, and wriggled out of his arms.

She came over to her and, standing a foot's space off, looked her over calmly, critically.

"Is this the Frau Tante?" she asked.

Grace laughed at the quaint figure, and held out her arms invitingly. She was attached to children, and here was a new and interesting type, which would not be difficult to love, if that were permitted.

"Will you not come to me, my dear? I love little girls."

Elsie shook her head slowly.

"I wish you would," Grace entreated, her hands still extended.

Elsie again shook her head, and put her hands back of her with an air of defiance.

Duncan's straight eyebrows met in a frown at that.

"Go to your aunt," he said.

Most people would have obeyed him at once, for there was a sound in his voice that plainly said he would not brook disobedience. However, this small miss was unlike the general run of people, and to obey was a verb always disagreeable to her, so she simply looked at him, and, shaking her head, refused point blank.

"You will not?"

"Nein."

"Why not?"

"Because I will not," and, evidently foreseeing the storm before it burst upon them, she added with an indescribable gesture of contempt, "Schoen ist sie ja nicht."

He sprang forward, and laid his hands on her shoulder by no means gently.

"You naughty girl!" he exclaimed; "suppose I take you upstairs and chastise you as you deserve? I will let you off, if you go this instant to the lady, and kiss her, and beg her pardon for being impertinent."

"Ich will nicht."

"Do you hear me?"

"Ich will nicht."

"Oh, let her go, please," Grace said, laughing; "Elsie and I no doubt will soon be warm friends—chums perhaps—who knows?"

"Translate what you said," he commanded sternly, frowning at the little figure.

"Beautiful is she not at all," the child said promptly.

"I thought it was something insolent. Leave the room. I shall see your mother about this later on. Go!"

Elsie did not move.

"Do you hear me?"

"Yes."

"Then obey!"

She flounced out of the room. They could hear her running upstairs. Grace laughed, and going to where her husband stood, laid her hand on his shoulder.

"I did not think you could be so angry," she said lightly; "and over such a slight thing too. Elsie spoke the truth. That is all. I do not mind. I have never thought that I was beautiful. You must not mind her—a little child."

"She is rude, and she knows better. I do object to it."

"Why does she lapse into German when her English is so good?"

"It is a trick used in naughty and mischievous moods. One can always tell the way the wind blows by that."

"There is an advantage in that for those who have charge of her. It is a warning—a preparation."

"Elsie has been put to bed," a low, sweet voice said back of them; "she was exceedingly rude, and Sauerwein and I had to punish her for it. I am sorry."

They turned and faced Lelia Aus der Schlogl. She was a tall, slender woman of distinction and some beauty. The figure clad in a simple white flannel gown was the acme of grace; the bare throat, white, round, charming; and the face a lovely oval, with straight firm nose, bewitching mouth, and full, reddish brown eyes. Her complexion was smooth, clear, perfect, and without color.

"Her hair—how shall I term it but summer sunbeams curled?
I know 'twould make a hermit gay and win him to the world."

There was not a little red in the summer sunbeams curled, but is that a fault? One is told that some of the famous beauties of antiquity possessed this glory, and to-day one encounters hundreds of women who, resorting to chemists, in vain seek to obtain that marvelous tinting which Titian immortalized. Lelia Aus der Schlogl had it by the grace of God, and she rejoiced in her good fortune with unaffected sincerity. It was a privilege to be endowed with red hair, and she acknowledged that it had taken her farther than anything else. In a crowd it at once compelled attention,

and made her the most conspicuous woman present. Everybody looked at her. And then the other attractive points did the rest.

"And this is Grace—my sister?" she said in her even, sweet way. And coming forward she embraced her in a charming manner, which had taken years of European observation to acquire. It was, however, perfect now, and the admiration of every body in New York, who had the privilege of knowing it.

"I welcome you, and admit that it is delightful to have my brother married at last. He will be the ideal husband, for in him are the makings of that *rara avis*. I know whereof I speak. One does not go through the burning, fiery furnace of experience for nothing. There are married men and married men, but few true husbands. You will have one of these."

Her brother laughed, but nevertheless he was pleased over what she said. What man would not have been?

"Are our rooms ready?" he asked with a happy look at her.

"Yes, shall I show you the way?"

"No, I will take Grace up. She will rest awhile before dinner, which is at the usual hour—6:30—I suppose?"

"The usual hour. And shall you go to the opera this evening? I intended going. Perhaps you prefer being alone, together, the first evening?"

He flushed, and looked at his wife furtively. He was not sure that that arrangement would be satisfactory to her.

"What shall we do?" he asked, hoping she would decide upon remaining at home with him. She looked

from brother to sister, and back again before speaking.

"You place me in a dilemma," she said finally; I am, as one of you knows, a music enthusiast, and opera is not an every-day matter in my life. Would it be odd if we went out in this way on our wedding day?"

Lelia Aus der Schlogl laughed. She had a beautiful laugh, and liked showing it off.

"I should say no," she answered; "you and Adam have come home in the good old-fashioned way; there is no wedding journey; no fuss and feathers. Nobody knows you here, and you might just as well go to the opera to-night as stay at home. Think of all the evenings before you, as dear Darby and Joan."

The wife colored and felt far from pleased. She suspected that her sister-in-law in reality did not want them to go to the opera.

"What is the bill?" Duncan asked, seeing his evening gone, and meeting the calamity with fortitude.

"*Traviata* and *Cavalleria Rusticana.*"

Grace's countenance brightened at the names, and that settled the point with her husband.

"We shall go," he said, and he turned to his wife; "come, let us go upstairs. Lelia will excuse us. We shall meet again at dinner, and be at the opera together."

Lelia bowed her bright head, and smiled. Duncan and Grace left the room. As soon as the portiere fell in place, the smile left the lady's face, giving way to a thoughtful expression. She stood where they had left her for some time thinking, perfectly motionless. Lelia Aus der Schlogl was well schooled in every respect; she was always on guard. It was impossible to tell

from her face what she was thinking as she stood there so still. Presently she looked up and laughed softly and heartily to herself. What she laughed at was beyond conjecture. There had been nothing comical in the interview—absolutely nothing of that nature in either her brother or his wife. But laugh she did, and laughing she left the room for her own part of the house. Something really amused her much, whatever it was.

Duncan took his wife up the broad flight of stairs to the first landing and into the front room on the left side.

"This is your room," he said; "and also mine, whenever you will let me share it. This is where I expect to pass my happiest hours."

It was a wide, deep room with windows overlooking the square and the vivid hurly-burly beyond, furnished in silvery gray and delicate pink, a light, cheery place—a most attractive nest. Here and there were odd pieces of graceful furniture, made of white wood and touched with silver. On the walls were water colors of sunset and sunrise splendor, and lovely pictures of springtime both in nature and in love, framed in silver and touched with pink.

On the mantel, on the various tables, on the cabinets, wherever a vase or bowl could be placed, were roses—the flower of love—all of one variety and that *La France*. They blushed in welcome to the bride.

"Dear heart," he said, in his fond way; "see, everything is new here. I had all done as I fancied would be your taste. That room beyond is your bed-room, and further on is the dressing-room and bath, then

comes my bed-room, and leading out of that to the left is my sanctum sanctorum. Come, I will show you the way."

And with his arm around her waist, he led her through the rooms, pausing here and there as they went to point out particular features in each. In their way, all were perfect and, communicating as they did, formed a pleasant and cosy suite.

His den at the end was a regular man's room, fitted up in a way to invite ease. The office desk in one corner near the window was perhaps the most conspicuous piece of furniture in the room. It was covered with letters, telegrams, pamphlets, that had come for him during his brief absence from home. At sight of them a change came over the man. He seemed anxious to get to them. Grace read his glance, and saw her means of escape. She took action immediately.

"Do you not wish to read these?" she asked, touching the letters; "suppose I leave you for awhile? I saw my trunk in the dressing-room, and woman-like I am wild to unpack. After that, I can rest awhile before dressing for dinner. I shall leave you to yourself and to your letters and dispatches. You must wish to be alone."

She went away before he could deny the imputation.

XII

At six o'clock Grace stood at one of the windows of her sitting-room dressed for dinner. Time had passed quickly in unpacking and getting the bearings of the various rooms in the suite. There had not been a sound from the sanctum sanctorum at the end; Duncan was evidently engrossed in his mail matter. She thoroughly enjoyed the time she was left alone, and stood at the window in a contented frame of mind, looking with interest at the electric lights and the crowd moving in two streams, one going, the other coming.

At last she heard someone moving about in one of the distant rooms. It was her husband dressing for the opera.

In twenty minutes she heard him coming, and turning round she saw her husband in evening dress for the first time. There are some men who show off well in the stiff, conventional attire aforesaid, and he was one of them. Tall, broad-shouldered, straight-limbed, he appeared unusually handsome. His fair hair and white skin were accentuated by the black suit, and as she looked Grace acknowledged to herself that he was in every respect a noble man and of distinguished carriage.

He stood a short distance from her, smiling at her scrutiny.

"I am yours," he said, going to her and kissing her; "and you are mine. And if you are as satisfied with me as I am with you, all is well. What have you been doing to kill time? Did you need me?"

"No, I have made myself familiar with the rooms, and gotten along pleasantly by myself, sir. I did not pine for you."

"You did not? Why, that is treason! But wait, in a short time you will long for me—more than I do for you. You do not know what a husband really is, my dear."

"I am not a sentimental woman."

"I never took you for one. Still you will love me after awhile, and I want you to, of course." And he drew her close to him and rubbed his cheek against hers.

A bell rang.

"Dinner!" he exclaimed, and he caught her by the hand, and ran out of the room down the stairs like a young man, laughing gayly all the way. She joined in, and when they reached the dining-room door, both were flushed and almost breathless.

The butler threw the door open for them with a flourish, all the world as though he were showing them to a pew in the centre aisle, and he looked grave at their hilarity.

Duncan did not care, and walked into the room with the master's air. It was a splendid room, and the table a rare sight under the great chandelier ablaze with light. A modest and trim maid stood in the background to assist the butler. Mrs. Aus der Schlogl was not present.

Duncan led his wife to her proper place at the table, and seated himself. As the soup was being served, his sister entered.

Grace glanced up, and caught her breath at what she saw. If Lelia Aus der Schlogl was fine looking in the

reception-room a brief time ago, she was beautiful now, beautiful in an evening dress of black tulle, cut so as to show all that was possible of neck and arms. Her skin resembled creamy marble, and her neck and arms were so exquisitely shaped that one did not wonder that she exposed them, but there was so much of them shown that for a moment Grace hardly knew where to look. It was a distinct shock at first, like a sudden plunge into ice-cold water, but when the surprise had passed, she looked again, long and critically, and realized that she rather liked it. And as she gazed she recalled what someone had written about this matter—namely, that women who wear *decolleté* gowns comprise three classes, but one of which is justified, and wears it with propriety. The women "to the manner born," educated to it, taught the propriety of such exposure along with her catechism, wears this dress as a soldier does his uniform—as a matter of form, of duty, of necessity, and of habit. Such women wear this exposeful garment with no more notion of indelicacy than is entertained by the dusky belle of the Sandwich Islands, when she makes her debut in a string of beads, a cotton apron, and clinking anklets.

The second class, not so well warranted in following the fashion, are women not educated to it, those whose early life and training were not in *decolleté* circles, but instead have imbibed much of the puritanism, or prudishness, or provincialism, if one will, or orthodox teaching, of modest example and of rural simplicity.

The woman whose sudden rise in position tempts her into an unaccustomed baring of neck and arms against her conscience commits an impropriety.

The third class are the vain women, the silly and coquettish women, who have perfect figures and malformed intellects. These are the women who have in the eagerness for admiration disgraced the social regalia and made it a reproach.

The important thing is not how the body, but how the mind is clothed. When a high-cut mind goes out in company with a low-cut dress the world does not concern itself with the robe. But a *decolleté* spirit will permeate an assembly, though the neckband tickles its ears and the wrist-frills mask its hands.

It was plain to which of these classes Lelia belonged. Grace wondered to which she herself would belong in the course of time. At present she did not feel that she could go out in public as much undressed as this.

And this was the way these people got ready for the opera! She looked at her husband and at his sister, and understood that she in her heavy black silk—her one rich gown—was decidedly out of place. She was in what they would consider unpretentious street costume. It seemed as though something must be done, some explanation offered, an excuse made, and going to the opera, as far as she was concerned, abandoned until she was able to go in that manner to which they were accustomed. She was secretly mortified; her soup plate was removed, untouched, and the fish served before she took up the thread of what was being said.

"Is this another Sauerwein creation?" her husband was asking, looking his sister over in a way that showed he liked full dress in women; "you look well, really well."

"Yes, I know I do. Sauerwein has laid down the

law, and limited me to a special line, and this is one of her ideas. She declares red-headed people look best in black or white, and she will not permit a turquoise or an emerald, as you see. I protested, but in vain. However, she consented to cut the bodice lower than usual," and the lady smiled complacently, glancing down at her shoulders with as keen admiration as an outsider could have expressed.

"May I ask who Sauerwein is?" Grace said, rallying sufficiently to break what was becoming a *tête-à-tête;* "I have heard you use the name before."

"Yes, in connection with Elsie perhaps. Sauerwein is my companion, maid, adviser, Elsie's governess—what you will. Remind me of it to-morrow and I will tell you her story. It is rather interesting, but too long and sad for the present occasion, and besides Adam has heard it many times."

"Where is Elsie? She is not in bed still, is she?"

"Oh, no; we kept her in bed one hour only as punishment for her rudeness, and that subdued her. She is not allowed to come to the table and takes her meals with Sauerwein. I believe in keeping children back. In that respect I am a thorough European. The truth is: I cannot be annoyed by always having her around, asking questions, pushing herself forward, and making herself obnoxious generally. I am still young enough to wish to enjoy my life."

"And she would be a disturbing factor, eh, Lelia?" Duncan laughed; "what would Chauncey Don and the rest do, if she were *en evidence* constantly?"

"Leave me severely alone, of course, and I should not blame them for doing so. Because I have been mar-

ried and have a child, is no reason why I should be shelved and not permitted to enjoy the good things of life, as I did before those calamities. I do not allow Elsie to call me mamma when others are present. I am 'my dear' to her then, or Lelia, but never mother. She has a trick of calling me 'my dear,' and it is fetching at certain times, so I encourage it."

At this juncture Duncan said something low to the butler and that personage left the room for a few minutes, presently returning and going on with his rites at the sideboard with the deft assistance of the maid.

"Don of course will be at the opera," Duncan said; "by the way he dines with us to-morrow, and afterwards we must go to some play."

"Have you seen him?" Lelia asked with surprise.

"Yes, he was on our train, and we met. We came together to New York, and Grace can tell you what a jolly trip we had. You have lost your bet."

She laughed.

"I do not care if I have. I was only teazing Don,—or rather trying to enslave him. That was but a small part of the game. And so he was base enough to tell you all about our bet! I shall reward him for that."

"He revealed nothing, that is, nothing you could take exception to. Your brother will bear me out in this."

"What do you think of this young gentleman? Is he not handsome?"

"Indeed he is."

"But he knows it quite as well as anybody."

"Why should he not?" Duncan put in; "each time he sees himself he is reminded of it, and every woman

he meets tells him so too. I wonder the flattery paid him all his life has not utterly spoiled him. He has had more attention than even a belle receives. I could many a curious tale unfold in which he has figured as the chief person."

"I am aware of it. I could do the same."

"Is he a vain man?" Grace asked.

"Of course," Lelia laughed; "did you ever know a man that was not? But this one has reason for being vain."

"A man as glorious as he is," her brother said; "may be excused some vanity. Do we not pardon it in a pretty woman? Don has been endowed with face and form of uncommon beauty. It is a gift, and he well may be proud of it as such."

"And besides that," Lelia continued; "he has money, he leads the cotillion, he tells society whom to receive, what to do, and then helps himself to do it. Don is society's thinking machine. You need not try to enter society if you are not on his list, for it would be useless."

"Is he clever? Does he do anything?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean professionally."

"He does not work, if that is what you mean. That is beneath him. Don does not belong to the working class. He is a gentleman."

Grace flushed. She did not know how to take that, so she ate her pudding in silence.

"He is not a professional man," her husband explained; "he is merely a rich young fellow, admired by the few who go to make up the set to which he

belongs. We will not deceive you, my dear. We are not in that set, and probably never shall be. You will learn before long that we are not exactly society people."

"But we wish to be," his sister rejoined, "and we shall be. I am determined to be in *the* set. You may watch my rise, if you care to do so. I am going up."

"The opera is part of it, I presume. Now, I know why you were so particular about the Metropolitan."

"You are correct in your surmise."

"Well, you must get Grace to assist you. She may care for that sort of thing. To-night, however, I have a fancy to be with her alone, and you must not mind if I gratify myself. We shall see *Traviata and Rusticana* by ourselves."

"I do not understand."

"Oh, you may have the box to yourself, and the *coupé*. I have secured two orchestra chairs, and ordered a hansom for Grace and myself."

"Why, what is this?" she cried, but she was pleased with the arrangement; "I see, you are lovers, and wish to be by yourselves, and you are right. It will be charming so. You and Grace will have a treat down there, and I shall look at you with lively interest. It is a little wedding journey. Be sure to point out everything to her. I shall take Jean Grey with me. I could not sit in the box without a woman, you know. Really, I envy you your dear expedition. This is your one opportunity, for next week you will have to be in the box."

So she rattled on. But Grace comprehended the true reason of the arrangement, and was grateful to her

husband for coming to her rescue in this quiet and sensible fashion. He knew, and she knew, that she could not go to their opera box dressed as she was, and there was no time in which to make a change even were it possible.

"Thank you," she whispered, as they left the dining-room.

He pinched her arm, and laughed down into her uplifted eyes in acknowledgment.

"It is time to go," he said. And the three went up the broad staircase together, Mrs. Aus der Schlogl leaving them at their apartments and going up the next flight.

"Be sure to have a good time!" she called out, kissing her hand to Grace; "it is going to be an enjoyable evening, I think."

"Excuse me a moment," Duncan said, going to his bed-room; "but get ready. The hansom is waiting outside, Whitacre says."

She donned a jaunty evening bonnet, which fortunately formed part of her wardrobe, found her wrap and gloves, and was in readiness before her husband.

When he appeared she saw that he had made an entire change, and was no longer in full dress.

"This is far more comfortable," he remarked, putting on his top coat and leaving the rooms with her. "And you and I are in for a jolly evening."

She was grateful, but she was unable to express her gratitude. There are women and women. This one was by nature diffident. She was not ready for the occasion with a word, a laugh, a gesture, as Lelia Aus der Schlogl would have been. But when they were in

the hansom she ventured to cuddle up to her husband, thereby expressing her gratitude more eloquently perhaps than any other way would have been—at least to him. With a passionate cry he enfolded her in his arms.

The Metropolitan Opera House was blazing with lights when they reached it, and throngs were pouring into the various entrances. After finding their seats, Grace felt that peculiar thrill that immense audiences have on the artistic temperament. The house was crowded in almost every part. The tiers of boxes were but half filled as yet, though it was nearly time for the overture. She had never seen such a magnificent opera house or such a large audience before, and looking about her in silence she felt happy for the time being. Duncan sensibly left her alone, being pleased with her appreciation of the place, undemonstrative though it was. He felt that it was sufficient.

In a delightful trance she listened to the opera. After awhile he touched her hand, and following his glance, she saw Lelia Aus der Schlogl enter one of the boxes in the first tier. She observed her with peculiar interest; for next week she would be in the same position herself, and she wished to be initiated in certain directions.

Lelia entered without her wrap; she had dropped it on a chair by the door. She came forward, and took one of the front seats. In the glare of thousands of lights, in that mass of people, among the distinguished-looking occupants of the boxes her face stood out clear and bright, even dazzling. As if magnetized, everybody turned, and stared. Yes, she certainly was a most beautiful woman, if her hair, now light and curling in

a picturesque manner, was red, and the black tulle gown cut conspicuously low.

"What a stunning woman!" a rude fellow exclaimed, turning round.

"Yes, and look at her frock!" his companion answered, peering through his opera-glass. Everybody took up his glass and stared. It made Grace uncomfortable, but her husband smiled, and did not seem to mind. The other women in the boxes were as *decolleté* as Lelia, but they were not such striking people otherwise, and hence escaped comment. Her companion was not pretty. She was, however, extremely interesting and sumptuously robed, though nobody cared to look at her twice under the circumstances.

"Do you think she sees them?" the girl whispered, meaning the staring people.

"Yes. She likes it. See how she holds her head. Lelia is a success to-night. Sauerwein understands her business."

Between the opera and that box Grace was unable to enjoy herself as much as she had expected. She was too much disturbed. If she lost herself in the music it was but for a moment. Through it all she knew that extraordinary head was shining up there, and against her inclination she was obliged to look thither, so the interest was divided. Between the acts she saw gentlemen passing to and from the box, and finally, among them Chauncey Don, who, in his way, was fully as remarkable as Lelia. He was quite at home with the ladies, and while she was watching them she saw by their manner that they were speaking of her, indeed at that moment Don and Jean Grey glanced down to a par-

ticular point, indicated by Lelia's huge black fan. She at once fastened her eyes on the stage, and so avoided their recognition, which for some reason she could not account for was not agreeable to her.

Don did not come to them between the following acts. She expected him, and it puzzled her that he did not come. As the curtain fell on the final scene of the opera she turned to her husband.

"Let us go home," she said; "I have had enough."

He jumped up beaming. In a few minutes they were out in the winter air. He hailed a hansom, and soon they were being driven homeward. He held her hand close in his, but did not talk. The silence was eloquent. She knew he was happy.

The starlight shone on his fair face as she stood beside him in front of his home, while he paid the cabman and dismissed him. Still holding her hand, they ascended the stair. He let themselves in by a latchkey, and they went up to their rooms together, he smiling as they went. How happy he was!

As he closed the door, he held out his arms, saying in a whisper: "Dear heart, alone—at last!"

XIII

TEN o'clock the next morning saw the husband and wife on their way to the dining-room, a distant bell having summoned them to breakfast.

"I am afraid to go down," she said, with a rueful air, as they left their rooms.

"Why?"

"Oh, it is an ordeal for me—more or less. And Mrs. Aus der Schlogl is a keen observer. And there is your butler. He makes me think of my catechism."

"I was never good at my catechism."

He laughed at her.

"You will not see Lelia. She is never visible before twelve, and as for Whitacre, why he is only a servant, and does not count. Never consider servants any more than you do the furniture in the room. They are not required to think or look anything foreign to their duties. If they do, it is impertinence, and one discharges them on discovering it. We pay well for their service, and all we ask is their best performance of the same. Beyond that they must not go."

"And shall we see Elsie?"

"No. As long as she has been here, I have not seen her at this or any other meal. Occasionally Lelia allows her to come in as dessert is served."

"She and the governess eat together?"

"Yes. At breakfast I am alone. I make an effort to get down town to my office by half-past nine. I have many irons in the fire; there are innumerable

questions to decide, and a crowd of people to see me. So, until three o'clock, I am busy in my own way."

"I shall be up every morning to break my fast with you. It will be our *tête-à-tête,* and we shall make the most of it. Besides, I am not used to late hours."

"Thanks; I shall expect you. Hereafter breakfast will be the pleasantest meal of the day instead of the loneliest."

"Flatterer!"

"No. I mean exactly what I say, dear."

"You are too considerate to say anything else."

By this time they were in the dining-room where the butler received them with an air so churchly that she at once sobered down, and took the seat he pulled out for her, in silence. For the moment badinage, or any chatter for that matter, was clearly impossible, if not unseemly.

Duncan found his place supplied with the morning's *Tribune,* and a few letters. He glanced at the latter while butler and maid served the breakfast.

"Letters of felicitation," he said, looking at his wife with a radiant smile, quite oblivious of the attendants; "I dare say we shall receive any number now that the newspapers have been so explicit in announcing the marriage. Shall I read them to you?"

"Spare me. I shall no doubt receive the various accounts from Mrs. Larch, who keeps track of these things. Her fancy is to preserve all personal mention from newspapers in a scrap-book. She has a bulky one about herself and Cecily, and prizes it highly."

"Shall you have such a book?"

"No. It is a foolish thing for anyone to do. I care

nothing for what reporters say about society. I do not believe a true society woman—a lady with fine feeling—would permit herself to be written up. It is impertinent to write up one's toilette or doings the way it is generally done nowadays, and I object to it. If I am a professional or public character, well and good—perhaps—but I am not, and I hope I shall be left severely alone by Printing House square."

"But you will not be. You will be constantly in print as Lelia is. Every day there is something about her. It is the inevitable; you will have to submit as gracefully as you can."

"I can request them not to mention me."

"Yes; if you see the reporters. That happens, however, only now and then. You will have to endure the silly descriptions of those people who do not know you even by sight."

"I am to be persecuted and made uneasy? Tell me what I must do to escape it."

"To escape is impossible. The only thing to do is to go on your way calmly, and not mind reportorial gad-flies. Do not read the society column, or if you do, take what is written as a joke."

"In a word, one must not be sensitive."

"What are you going to do to-day? I shall be home at four, and we can drive in the park and along the Riverside drive till dinner time."

"I shall manage to exist until your return. I am going to get acquainted with your sister and Elsie. Is that not diversion enough for one day?"

The butler and maid were out of the room for a moment at this juncture.

Duncan came over to her and, leaning down, pressed his face against her head with a laugh.

"Lelia will take you to the shops, and in that way you will become friends. Foreseeing this I have made out a check for you. There may be trifles that you will like to pick up going from place to place. At the large houses, where she buys, we have accounts. Make yourself at home, and do as you like in all of them."

The servants returned.

"I must go," he announced, standing upright.

Grace rose, and went with him into the hall to the annoyance of the butler, who followed to assist the master with his top coat, such being an established custom of the household. As soon as he had performed the service he was told to go.

"I shall stand at the door until you are out of sight," Grace said; "and cheer you on your way."

When the butler was past hearing Duncan embraced his wife.

"Dear heart, think of me as I shall think of you all day."

He opened the door, and went out into the crisp air with a quick, firm step, looking back in a radiant way.

The *coupé* and Ogden were at the curbstone waiting to take him to his office. In a moment they were gone; they were lost in the mighty rush and roar of Broadway beyond. She closed the door, and ran upstairs to her rooms with a smiling face. She had looked at the check which her husband had slipped into her hand at the breakfast table and was smiling at the amount. It was five hundred dollars. And he had told her this sum was for trifles she might like to pick up going

from place to place! It made her smile, and no wonder: she had never had so large an amount of money before, and it was all for herself too.

She no sooner got into her front room than a knock sounded at the door and, going to it, she heard Lelia Aus der Schlogl's voice outside.

"Am I too early? May I come in?" she asked, opening the door before Grace reached it, and smiling in her beautiful way from the threshold; "I saw Adam go. Well?"

"Pray come in. I am glad to see you any time."

She entered, and closing the door leaned against it, still smiling her beautiful smile. She had on a morning gown of white, and the wonderful hair was knotted high upon her head. Few women appear well in the morning light, unless they are young. This one did. Her complexion defied the bright light of day as it did the gas and electric rays of night: it shone fine and perfect, and there was not a line or blemish visible.

"Well?" she repeated, looking her sister-in-law over critically.

"What do you want me to tell you? What does this 'well' mean? I will not answer it, whatever it is. Come over here, and sit down. Here is a comfortable chair." And she dragged a rocker forward.

Lelia seated herself.

"What shall we do between now and dinner time?" she asked; "have you made any plans?"

"Mr. Duncan will be back at four o'clock to show me your park and the Riverside drive. The rest of the day is at your disposal. Do with me as you will, and I shall be satisfied."

"The *coupé* will be back in an hour, and then we can go out, to the shops, if you have no objections. I must buy a few things for myself and Elsie to-day."

"I shall be glad to go shopping. I too, must make some purchases. And perhaps you will be so good as to advise me. I made but little preparation in Tenbrook for my new life, and there are many things I must get. I must be a credit to my present charming surroundings."

"I shall be delighted to help you spend money. Nothing pleases me more, I suppose because I have so little of my own to spend. I consider it a decided form of happiness to go into these big shops and buy just what strikes one's fancy. It is pleasure; it is power; and both appeal to me."

"I want evening dresses, house dresses, wraps, bonnets—everything in fact, and you must help me with your taste in selecting them."

"How delightful this is! I am wild to be off. It will be most agreeable to me to pass the morning in this way."

"I shall place myself entirely in your hands, and you may do with me as you please. Surely you will be able to do something with me."

"I am confident of that, and also that with your money we can do a great deal in a few hours. At five I must show myself at a reception. Jean Grey receives to-day. You saw her with me last night. She will call on you soon."

"And what shall we do about luncheon?"

Lelia laughed.

"I never lunch," she said; "for the past two years

I have been compelled to absent myself from the luncheon table because of a tendency towards *embonpoint.* I have to be careful, or else lose my symmetry, and when I lose that I may as well retire altogether. What would I be without my figure? You would be astonished at what I have to undergo in order to stay as I am. I am what I am by sheer hard work."

"I suppose you restrict yourself to a meagre bill of fare?"

"No; but I must be careful of my diet. I have a list of articles I may and may not eat, and I follow it religiously. Shall I give it you against your day of obesity? You may need it, you know."

"If you please."

And she named the list.

"I think you have many nice things to eat and drink even if you are limited to that list."

"Two meals *per diem,* and those particular eatables do not make existence hard by any means. To be beautiful is not the easy thing some folk imagine. Whether I am that or not is one thing, but that I am in training like a race-horse or an athlete is another, and a stubborn fact. However, enough of the personal pronoun for the present. Get ready, and I shall come back as soon as I change my frock. Ogden will be here presently."

She left the room.

In half an hour she returned, and found her sister-in-law ready for the shopping expedition. Directly after that they heard the coachman drive up, and stop at their curbstone.

XIV

CHAUNCEY DON called that afternoon between three and four. Just as he was about to touch the electric button, the butler opened the door gravely. He had seen the gentleman coming, and did not wait for the ring. If this dignitary had a favorite among the callers at the Duncan household—if he had a weakness, it was for this radiant child of fortune. He almost smiled at sight of him.

"How d'ye do?" Don said in his cheerful way, which everybody found irresistible; "does the world go well with you, my man? Announce me, please."

"Mrs. Aus der Schlogl is not in, sir. She has gone to Mrs. Grey's."

Don smiled, and his face lighted up as if glorified, the smile was so dazzling.

"Are all the rest out too? I am to dine here to-night. Where is your mistress? Is your master back?"

"Mr. Duncan has not returned from his office. A short time ago I heard voices in the reception room. Mrs. Duncan may be in there. Shall I see?"

"No, I know the way, and we have already met."

And he gave his coat and hat to him and went towards the reception-room in that manner which showed familiarity with the house and its inmates. For a moment he stood at the threshold holding the portiere aside, and listened. In the distance he saw Grace seated, and before her, with face upraised and

hands clasped in front of her—Elsie Aus der Schlogl. This is what he overheard:

"I forgive what you did last evening, and you must not think of it again."

"I was grief-stricken when I returned to myself. Frau Tante, I want to be *vornehm*."

"I am sure you will love me, and I already like you so much. I am sorry you had to be punished on my account."

"I will obey. I will be good. You were good-hearted to send for me. Frau Mama is out, but the gouvernante gave me permission to join you, so that I might apologize. She also said I might remain a time, if I were good."

The listener smiled as he stood there hearing the child's precise sentences.

"I can at times be noble," she continued; "Herr Papa belongs to the nobility. I do not forget. In this country there is no nobility. Some day, when I am older, I shall live in my native land, and be at Court."

"Are you not an American?"

"Oh, no. I was not born here. I have almost royal blood—at least from Herr Papa. I go back after a time."

"Are you not contented here?"

"At times. I love Herr Onkel, and others. I am happy when people do not have the blues. That is ever sad."

"The blues!"

"Yes, often Frau Mama and the gouvernante have the blues for days and do not speak to one another, because they have them so bad. I am unhappy then."

"Well—come, tell me whom you love besides your uncle."

"Oh, I do not like to give their names. I used to love Herr Don first and best."

"Why is he dethroned?"

"He wants to marry Frau Mama and be Herr Papa, but I think one Herr Papa sufficient, do not you? I have one in Europe."

"When you crossed the ocean did anybody tell you what could be seen by a diver?"

"Oh, no, can you tell me? Were you ever a diver?"

"I can tell you what an ocean diver said once upon a time. He said certain seas are famous for their fishes and many are beauties, being striped bright green, yellow, blue and red. Others have long streamers, and look like harlequins and columbines in pantomines. And there is the greatest difference between them in their habits. Some were shy and darted away on the slightest motion, while others seemed to think me a huge fish, and came near me, as if curious to see what I was like. Among the strange things which may be seen by divers is the ocean forest off the eastern coast. The sandy bottom there is covered with the hardened roots of great trees, and in some instances parts of the trunks are standing, showing that the coast there must have settled, and that the sea has rolled over the land. Some times we go down at night, and then the scene under water is a beautiful sight. Every jellyfish and living creature seems to be ablaze with light, your rope appears to be on fire, and every motion makes the water glimmer. The crabs and fishes sparkle, many with a light of their own."

"Frau Tante, you cannot fool me. No diver told you that. I have it in my journal upstairs. The gouvernante read it to me the other day."

"Well, I did not say that I heard it, or that I knew the diver. How can I interest you, if you are so sharp? I want to win your allegiance, my dear little maid. But tell me, have you heard of the dust fairies?"

"Are there any?"

"But, O! they're so wondrously little
I scarcely can see them at times;
And whenever they do 'appear to my view'
(This I quote from my fairy rhymes)
And climb up the ladder of sunshine
That slants through a window or door,
Why, I take my chance at seeing them dance
For maybe an hour or more.

And O! but the housemaid's angry,
And she tries to put them to rout;
With her duster in hand, from chair to stand
She chases them all about.
And I laugh and I laugh as I watch her,
For how can the poor thing know
That they are small elves enjoying themselves
As they used to a long time ago?"

"I do not believe there are fairies."

"Really, my dear—"

Don laughed, and stepped into the room at this point.

"I have come to your rescue," he said gayly; "Elsie is a veritable tyrant, and she would lead you a dance,

if she could. But I am on the scene in time to protect you."

"You are welcome," Grace said, rising, and blushing at the thought of all that he might have overheard; "I was trying to become acquainted with Elsie, and resorted to certain ways, in order to reach that end. But I am not sure that I have succeeded."

"I think you have. If I am mistaken, then dear Elsie is a hardhearted, cruel creature, and I never considered her as bad as that."

"I am not bad," the child put in, with a frown.

"Of course you are not. We can have Fraulein Sauerwein down to bear you witness, if necessary. Do you think she would come?"

"I will go and see, Herr Don. She will tell you that I am good."

"Thank you. Perhaps it will be best."

Elsie left the room, with an air of conviction and importance.

"It is too bad to send her to Sauerwein," he laughed; "she will not let her come back, and the poor thing may make a scene."

Grace smiled.

"I am earlier than perhaps I ought to be," he said; "but I like to come to this house whatever the hour. And I knew if you and the rest were out I could rest and wait until you returned. It is so good to have a house like this on your list."

"I look for Mr. Duncan any moment. He is overdue as it is. Mrs. Aus der Schlogl is at a reception, and will not be gone long. I am glad you feel free to come to our house in this way, for it proves that we

are something better than mere fair weather friends."

"Oh, you do not understand how I feel towards this house, or anything of the delightful times I have passed herein. I regard it in the light of a home. Do you know all that that word means to a single man alone in the world?"

"Have you no home of your own?"

"None."

"Are there no near relatives—no home ties in your life?"

"None."

"I recall that somebody said you lived in and for the gay world. I had forgotten it for the moment."

"I see I have been under discussion, and I know people well enough to know what that means. You will permit me to put in a word for myself, under the circumstances?"

"With pleasure."

"I am in the gay world, of course. I am single and rich, and I have my own place. I make the most of it, and it is exceedingly agreeable. What relatives I have are remote, but I have friends that are precious to me, and dearer than relatives."

"Are you never dissatisfied with being alone, without a home, without a profession?"

"Not at all. Why should I be?"

"There are noble things you might do."

"For example—?"

"I need not enumerate them. Besides, I feel that I am not entertaining you as I should. You will find me dull."

"You are mistaken."

She rose, and walked over to the upright piano, and, standing in front of it, struck a few chords softly.

"I trust you will tell me what I can do to be noble," he said back of her; "It may be that I am selfish and narrow, and useless. I do not deny it. It seems to me that a woman sees farther than a man. You are right; I am a man of fashion, of the world worldly, a butterfly. It may be that I have a soul. I might be noble and good perhaps—if it were worth while."

She went on striking the keys, her head bent.

"You love music," she said, turning and looking at him.

"Who told you?"

"Nobody. I read it in your face. Let me play for you."

And, without another word, she pulled out the piano stool, seated herself, and played Chopin's Nocturne, No. 8, in a manner that would have been creditable to Vladimir De Pachmann, the Chopin virtuoso, himself. Her touch was firm and sympathetic, and at the first bar, if one knew aught of music, one realized she was past the line that separates the professional from the amateur.

Her listener was a musician. There had been a time in his life when he thought that he could give up the frivolities of society, his butterfly pleasures, and study, and be something in the artistic world—indeed he had passed four years in music study in Berlin and Stuttgart under renowned pianists, and contrapuntists, and had even made one or two public appearances in Leipsic with furore. But he possessed too much money, and he loved a gay, careless, life better than the drudg-

ery that must precede art success, and so, he had drifted away from those German days, until he was far off, and now often found it difficult to believe that he had ever lived them.

"You see, I was right," she said, after the final note, and looking up at him; "you do love music. Yours is the artistic temperament. What do you think of this?"

And she sang. It was a bit of German song. She had a lovely, velvety contralto, as well trained as her fingers. She was something better than a mere parlor singer. Her voice was full and clear and strong; she knew how to produce her tones; and her manner of enunciating was unaffected, full throated, and hence delightful.

It must be acknowledged that her listener was more than surprised. He grew positively enthusiastic, and this was a pleasing discovery to Grace; for in her reading of his character she had failed to credit him with that trait.

"You have astonished me," he said; "I did not expect to find that you were advanced in music. One does not run across true musicians every day. Amateurs, yes; there are too many of that ilk; but one does not count them. Tell me who your master was, and how you obtained your musical education."

"It is a long story, and no doubt will tire you."

"I think not. Such matters are deeply interesting to me."

"If I were a famous singer, a public musician, perhaps there would be some account of what I am about to tell in my obituary notices. But I am nothing of

the kind, and few people know anything of it. I do not mind your sharing the knowledge. There was an eccentric German professor in Tenbrook, who did everything for me. I was his favorite pupil. When quite a little thing I went to him for piano instruction. He used to say I had genius. I do not know whether I have or not. There were times, however, when I believed him, and then I worked. He taught me how to play, to sing, to compose, how to speak German, and enough Italian for vocal purposes. Those were happy, busy days. Besides these things, he taught me patience, bravery, endurance—or, rather, I saw how well he bore himself and, by imitating him, learned to be what he would have had me be. After awhile we planned an enjoyable and useful future together. He was to take me to Europe, and bring me out there as a singer. He said it was in me to achieve distinction in the world of song. Nothing could have made me happier than that career. But the professor was old, more or less an invalid, and just as we were about to undertake the project he fell ill, and died. I think sometimes that I should have gone on, even without him. There is a feeling that I have done both himself and myself injustice; that I have taken the wrong way."

"Were not your own people jealous of the professor, and this love for him? Perhaps, though, they were in sympathy with it."

"Jealous!" she exclaimed, and she laughed; "Oh, no; they could never have been jealous. They did not know our plans. The week the professor fell ill he intended asking permission to take me to Germany.

But it was not necessary to tell them. He passed away, and I was left to get along by myself as best I could."

"And you did not become what he wished you to be? Are you content to hide your gifts, and his training? What would he say?"

She paused before answering the question, and in the pause the portiere was drawn aside, and somebody stood on the threshold looking at them.

XV

It was Duncan. He stood on the threshold for a moment, looking at them; then came forward with his usual friendliness for Chauncey Don.

"I am glad to see you," he said shaking hands; "I hope Grace has entertained you well. Where is Lelia?"

"She is at Mrs. Grey's," his wife answered; "but she said on leaving the house that she had no intention of remaining away any length of time."

"I daresay she has simply gone to Jean Grey's in order to be *en evidence*. Lelia is the kind of woman who finds these big receptions stupid. But, my dear, you had better get ready. We will excuse you the customary five minutes."

She bowed to Don, and left the room.

"I have promised her a drive this afternoon," Duncan said as the portiere fell in place; "and the team is outside waiting. We shall not be gone long. You will not mind?"

"Not in the least. You know that I am at home here. And Mrs. Aus der Schlogl will soon be back. I can send for Elsie. Or I can go into the library. You must have your drive. It will be a rare treat to show off the few lions we have to such a new, quick, bright intelligence as that of your wife."

"Do you find her new, and quick, and bright?"

"Yes, and in some respects a gifted personality. When you come back, or better still when we are *en garçon* once more, I shall tell you what I mean."

The husband smiled. He stood in the centre of the room, tall and straight, apparently in a cordial mood, but he was asking himself all manner of questions. He was not exactly entertaining that universal and unbidden guest, the green-eyed monster. His disposition was not of a jealous bent, and yet he felt uneasy at having found his wife and Don together in what seemed an interesting interview. The man was young, extremely handsome, captivating, perhaps dangerous. Well as he knew him, and much as he admired him he did not fancy finding him with her *têta-à-tête*. He was a man with a past, with more than one affair of the heart. Lelia ought to have been at home to receive him. It was provoking of her to be at Jean Grey's, or anywhere else, when he had informed her that they might expect him to-day at dinner.

"Was my sister here when you arrived?" he asked, rousing himself.

"No; she had already gone out. I found Mrs. Duncan and Elsie together. Elsie has gone up to Sauerwein to obtain a certificate of good nature. I doubted her goodness—or rather she seemed to think that I did—so she seeks proof with which to confuse me."

He colored. Don's explanations implied that he read what was passing in the husband's mind.

"Here is Grace!" Duncan said, and she came in ready for the drive; "we shall not go far, and you will not have long to wait. I do not think we shall have time to go out of the park as it is."

"Mrs. Aus der Schlogl will be back any moment," Grace said; "and is that not worth waiting for? And

besides, she wishes to see you particularly. She told me so this morning."

She laughed, and left the room with her husband, before Don could make any remarks.

For some time after leaving Madison square there was nothing said either by Duncan or his wife. He was taken up in managing his horses, two spirited bays, which demanded all the skill of an experienced driver, while she was quite as absorbed in her way, looking at the dwellings, and the people they were passing.

Finally, as they left the main drive in the park and drove along the river side, he turned and looked at her with a tender smile.

She smiled back.

"Do you love me?" he asked.

"I will not tell you."

"No?"

"No."

He laughed, and leaned against her caressingly.

"Is it not delightful to be out in the cold air?"

"The early winter is beautiful."

"We shall drive every afternoon while the fair weather lasts. There are some attractive points you will enjoy seeing."

They went a distance in silence.

"How do you like Don on further acquaintance?" he asked in an off-hand way.

"I still consider him an unusually handsome man, and extremely interesting. There can be no two opinions about that. Have you known him long?"

"Two or three years. We met him first at Mack-

inac Island. Somebody told us to go there—it was so new and pleasing, and there was capital black bass fishing—and we went, and of all dreary times that was the dreariest, or would have been, had it not happened that he was there too. He like ourselves had gone for bass. It was miserable weather. The Island was deserted, and for one week we three were exiles in misery. Necessarily we were thrown together, and so struck up a friendship. He has been with us ever since in quite an intimate way."

"He is a gifted man—at least I judge as much from what I have seen. But of course I know nothing of him. Where is he from?"

"I do not know—none of us know. I have often wondered myself. Some distant southern plantation is said to have been the scene of his birth. The rest of his life was passed in various schools in this country and in Europe, and in wanderings over the world. Don is a veritable globe trotter. I have the strangest liking for him. I cannot explain it."

"He must have money."

"Heaps of it—at any rate sufficient to give him the gratification of every wish."

"Rich, handsome, gifted—and of the world worldly, what must his life be! Is he a good man?"

"'Be thou as chaste as ice, or pure as snow,
Thou shalt not 'scape the breath of calumny.'

Dear, that is one of the sad truths of life. None of us escape it."

"And he has not?"

"I did not say so."

"I thought you meant that he was no exception to the universal rule that you quoted."

"You are a sharp woman, and if I do not watch you, you will entangle me. But I am going to be careful. I am forewarned, and you will not catch me."

"Is he paying your sister attention?"

"Yes, just as dozens of men are. That sort of thing is always going on where she is concerned. She cannot avoid it, because she is a fascinating woman. She does not care to avoid it either. Yes, she and Don are together a great deal."

"Would she marry him? Would she marry again after the experience she has had?"

"I do not know. Some times I fancy she would; again I feel that she would not, under any circumstances. She had a terrible experience in Europe. There is no denying it. Max Aus der Schlogl is a brute, and he forced her to undergo all that that kind of a man can make a woman undergo. I do not want her to marry. I do not approve it, but what have I got to do with it, or anybody else for that matter?" If she will marry again, she will, and that is the end of it."

"But why should she? She has Elsie, you, a home, the life she likes above all others. Why should she care to change?"

"Nobody knows. She loves wealth, power, position, and above everything else she hates her husband. In marrying again she would gratify herself to the utmost, and spite him."

"But how unworthy a motive like that would be!"

"True. But unworthy motives sway people as much. and perhaps as often, as worthy ones."

"Do they love one another?" she asked earnestly.

"Oh, as to that I cannot say. Love comes in different ways. One cannot be sure whether it is love or not—sometimes. My private opinion in this case is that it is not love—as yet. They are friends, are taken with one another, and enjoy being together. You will see how it is after awhile, and be able to tell me whether it is true love, or not more quickly than I—stupid male biped that I am—can inform you. Women have double vision concerning such things."

"I will use my faculty at once, and enlighten you. I consent to being put to the test."

By this time they were rushing down Fifth avenue homeward. The thoroughfare was crowded with carriages and the sidewalks lined with the usual fashion-plate men and women out on dress parade. Dusk had come upon the city, and everywhere gas and electric lights flashed.

"It is time for dinner," he said, as they passed the Vanderbilt houses, urging his horses to greater speed; "if we are not there the moment the oysters are served, Whitacre will be intolerably insolent for the rest of the evening. I would discharge that fellow, if I could replace him within an hour. But it is difficult to secure competent butlers, and he is that in spite of his airs."

"After dining, what are we going to do?"

"I have secured four seats at the Empire. There are some of our best theatrical lions there and they roar very well in their new play. After seeing them we might sup at Delmonico's. It will not do for you to go wandering about the world asking what people mean when they allude to Del. No, that will never do."

"I daresay not. I felt so stupid after asking that question. I must be silent and watch and learn. Silence is golden, you know."

"Don is too much of a gentleman to tell. I do not think it will get out about you—at any rate, I hope not."

They came into view of the glittering hotels, the moving crowds of Broadway, the trees of the square, and of their home. The brightness, the gayety of the scene, the rush, the life—all were delightful, and she was loath to leave them for the house and the formality of dinner and Whitacre.

However, there happened to be no formality whatever. Everything went with dainty touch. Each one was in charming mood, and she remembered that evening as one of the brightest she had ever known.

Lelia was radiant, and so was their guest. Even Duncan was merry in their company, and once or twice Grace sparkled out in conversation in a surprisingly agreeable fashion.

The one solemn person present was the butler, and of course no attention was paid him, and soon he was out of their sight, for immediately after dinner they left the house for the theatre.

XVI

CHAUNCEY DON was regarded by people at large as a child of fortune. They said in chorus that he had been ushered into the world with a crowd of good fairies at hand to bless him as soon as he appeared with gracious gifts, and the proverbial bad fairy did not put in an appearance at all—at least if she did, nobody recognized her. It was claimed that the aforesaid gifts were numerous. He was said to have all the good things in life, without a hint of the bad. Everything worth having was his. He was a man, he was young, handsome, clever, rich. Apparently he had been all his life a stranger to the unpleasant and the sorrowful. He had no ties; he was his own master. All he had to do was to make merry with the gay world. People said, with an air that implied perfect knowledge of the subject, that he had been orphaned early in life, but otherwise his young days had passed by without a cloud, save the small clouds that come to childhood for an hour, and which are forgotten in the same space of time. It was also stated by these well-posted ones that he had gone to various schools, finally matriculating in a famous university, and, after graduating from thence, traveled extensively at home and abroad for several years.

Such were the general facts. If one of these well-informed persons were pinned down to exact state-

ments, however, nothing further was learned. One merely knew what one knew before, viz.: that he was Chauncey Don, young, handsome, clever, always eager to meet pleasure half way, with ample income to spend as fast as possible, in which endeavor he was more successful than in anything else he ever undertook.

He was received everywhere. He had been long in New York, and was of such agreeable and distinguished personality that nobody cared to ask whence he came or who he was. The idea that he could be anything but of ultra New York was preposterous—he was too *comme il faut,* to be aught else. No man dressed as he dressed; no man gave the wine suppers he gave; no man led the cotillion as he did; no man was better posted on the bagatelles of exclusive society than he was; no man talked as well; no man helped rosebuds as deftly; no man was as dear to married women; no man was as charming to single men and girls; in brief, no man in New York society was as indispensable as Don.

It was difficult to see his reason for being with the Duncans so much, if he had one. There were innumerable houses on his list more attractive and desirable, and among the ultra fashionable people at that. The Duncans did not belong to the set to which he was attached. He himself made no effort to lead them within the holy of holies, and yet he was constantly at their house, he accepted their invitations, and they did his, and he went about with them everywhere. But beyond this there was little, if any progress. Between them there was the frankest, the most delightful intimacy imaginable. Don's character was so winning

that it was impossible not to like him, and indeed no hard matter to love him.

Grace put her woman's wit into play, and tried to see if there was love between Lelia Aus der Schlogl and Don, but she failed to discover one sentiment that could be designated by that tender word. However, she learned that they were attracted by one another, much together, and doubtless intimate friends. Deeper than that she could not go. Lelia was outspoken in speaking of him and revealing a thorough knowledge of his life. For instance, one morning while on their way down town to a mammoth shop their *coupé* passed a hansom, in which they saw him and a stylish young woman. Grace leaned forward.

"Look, there is Mr. Don!" she exclaimed, on the point of bowing. Her sister-in-law pulled her back, and the hansom was passed without the occupants recognizing them.

"Why did you do that?" she asked; "did you not want to see him? You know, you said this morning that you had a message for him about to-night."

"Yes, I remember. My note is at his hotel, and he will get it in due time, never fear."

"But did you not care to bow to him?" she persisted.

"Well, no; I did not, under the circumstances. I will tell you why. You can stand it. Don, you know, keeps in cosy style uptown a *bijou* flat, of which that woman is the mistress. He would not like to have us bow when we see him with her."

Grace was mute. A peculiar expression was on her face.

"You silly girl!" Lelia said, striking her hand, and laughing; "how horrified you look! Do not mind this bit of information. He is no better than the rest."

"Who told you he maintained this uptown establishment?"

"Who told me? Why, I have forgotten. But it is true; you may depend on it. It is no uncommon thing for the young men of our world to maintain such establishments, or for their elders either. I know several that do. Men are men, my dear."

"I shall not like him as well as I did."

"Oh, nonsense! You will like him better than ever. This will not make any difference."

"You do not know me, if you think so."

That evening she could scarcely look at or speak to him, and he noted the change at once. He had sincere regard for her. Of all the women he knew—and he had known many—this one was without question the most interesting to him. She was different from the rest, not that she was more beautiful, more accomplished, or more gifted than the others of his rather wide acquaintance—for she was in reality inferior to several of them. But she was different in that she was earnest, straightforward, honest, and besides these admirable and rare qualities there was also an intangible something that drew him to her. He wanted to know her, to be with her, to be something to her—he knew not exactly what.

In the course of the evening an opportunity presented itself when he felt that he could speak to her quietly. Her husband and Lelia were for the moment engaged in entertaining two callers, who were stran-

gers to him. He and Grace for a second were left together. She made a movement towards the piano.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Duncan," he said; "but may I speak to you?"

"You may."

"I fear,—I—I think I have in some way given you offense."

"Pray, why do you think so?"

"I find it difficult to explain myself. On meeting you this evening I fancied that you had been offended by me. During the evening the fancy deepened, and now I feel convinced that I have unintentionally done something to displease you."

"Your imagination runs riot, Mr. Don."

"Nay; I am sure it does not. What is my offense? I will make restitution."

"You cannot."

"There, was I not right? I have done wrong somewhere. You have admitted it, and I shall not rest till I know what it is, and have regained your favor."

"Are you not jumping at conclusions?"

"I think not. Surely you will tell me what I have done amiss."

"I beg of you to let the matter drop."

"I prize your good opinion too highly to forfeit it without at least a struggle."

She looked towards the other occupants of the room in despair, seeking a means of escape from this persistent and dangerous man, but alas! there was none, and what was she to do?

"I had begun to feel that you were a friend," he said, watching the glance, and reading the desire to

escape; "I acknowledge too that this has made me proud. You are the kind of woman that can be a true, a loyal friend. I hoped such a blessing was to fall to my lot. Have I been presumptuous in indulging that hope?"

She thought he had, but for the life of her she did not see her way clear to telling him so.

"In justice you ought to tell what you have against me. You ought to give me the chance to clear myself—if I can. I demand the chance."

She looked up into the handsome face with a start of surprise, and realized at a glance that here was a nature fully as strong, if not stronger than her own, and also that she had permitted the matter to get beyond her control. She raised her head defiantly, and looked him straight in the eye. However, she immediately found that that had no effect whatever.

"I demand your reason," he said. His voice was low and steady, and over his face was a strange whiteness. "You have hitherto received me as though I was not distasteful to you. To-night I come to your house, and I find a radical change. Do you wish me to discontinue calling? Have I lost caste in your sight?"

She did not answer, but he read in her face that he had, and the determined look in his eyes deepened at the knowledge.

"I took you for a straightforward woman. I find now you can be unkind and hard as well."

"Allow me to speak, before you go any farther," she said; "I have listened to you in amazement. You have said enough—perhaps too much. I see I have

made a mistake. Some women would have been able to conceal their sentiments, but I have not learned the art of dissembling. I will be sincere. I will prove that your opinion of me is just, though flattering. And as I am a married woman, the wife of your friend, doubtless you will attribute a right motive to my present action. You are correct. There is a change. I do not feel towards you as I did yesterday."

"What have I done?"

"A fine sense of intuition has not played you false. I can but admire so keen a faculty. You have read me well."

"What have I done?"

"I am not like the women you know. You may consider it a matter for regret or not. I have my ideas, and I feel acutely where they are concerned."

"Will you never come to the point? What have I done?"

"Tell me who that woman was I saw in the hansom cab with you this morning?"

Don flushed even to his throat. He held his head down before her.

"You are answered," she said, after a moment's pause; "you will understand, and forgive me. I do not feel towards you as I did. I cannot be more explicit."

"What are you going to do?" he asked, without looking up. "Are you going to tell me not to call?"

"I am going to leave that with you. Do you think you can call?"

"What do you wish me to do?"

"I leave the matter with you."

"Will you listen to anything that I may say in extenuation?"

"No, I do not see what you could say to which I ought to listen. Forgive me, if I have transgressed all rules, and said more than I had any prerogative to say. But remember that you placed the matter upon the footing of friendship, sincerity and truth, and made a demand that I could not allow to go unanswered. I have tried to be true to myself as a woman and to yourself as a man. I do not feel that I have done wrong."

"You have not," he said, in a half-stifled voice.

She could not look at him, and she did not feel disposed to continue the disagreeable conversation, so she left him, going over to the piano. She was hardly in the proper mood for music, and yet something must be done to cover the awkwardness of the moment. As she was about to seat herself to play, the callers came forward to take leave. This made the desired break, and there was a chance to speak to her husband.

"Will you excuse us?" he said to Don, as soon as the callers were gone; "Grace is not feeling quite herself, and she and I will retire, if you do not mind."

"Leave him to me," Lelia cried, laughing; "I will see that he is entertained. I have many things to say to him, and no doubt he has to say to me. I shall put him on the witness stand, and cross-examine him till he wishes he had not been born. By-by, dearest Grace."

Grace bowed to Don. He returned it, without raising his eyes. The next moment he was left alone with Lelia Aus der Schlogl.

XVII

JEAN GREY was one of those clever rattle-brained women that infest society. She was no beauty, nor even rich, and yet she contrived to be, as she would say, in the swim with all the big fish. At all notable gatherings, at every prominent house, she was seen and heard. People invited her to their houses, loaned her horses and carriages, boxes at the opera, and invariably made much of her, whenever the opportunity presented itself. And be it said, that opportunity was never by any chance lacking.

The lady, her antecedents, and her surroundings were eminently good form. She was a childless widow, somewhere—anywhere—between thirty and fifty, with an income of a thousand dollars a year. To most persons this would seem but a beggarly income, but to Mrs. Grey it meant a great deal, and she knew how to make it go far. She owned a box of a house next to a stable in East Nineteenth street, furnished with by-gone odds and ends.

During the season numerous invitations came to the aforesaid box of a house, so the mistress of the same was virtually at little expense. It was not a difficult matter for such a clever woman to dress well—even modishly. She had brains, and knew the shops as well as she knew herself, and besides, she was fortunate enough to be the recipient of varied gifts from wealthy

friends at holiday time and upon their return from London and Paris.

Why she was courted and favored by the gay world was a simple matter. It lay in a nutshell: she was of a great and affluent family, now all of the past, except herself; moreover, people feared her. She allowed herself with perfect impunity the liberty of saying any and everything she chose, wherever she went. It was a point with her to know her world as thoroughly as constant *espionage* permitted, nothing escaped her vigilance—and no one woman therein was as intimately acquainted with skeletons in the closet as she. And she had a trying way of misleading and worrying people, of misunderstanding and misrepresenting them without warning, or rhyme, or reason. So it never paid to snub her, or try to keep her in her proper place. Effort in that direction met with disastrous results, so by degrees people found it wisest to let her have her rope, to invite her to their functions, and generally to make the best of a bad bargain. There were a few good points about her. For instance, she could be called upon to fill up unavoidable gaps at dinner, at small parties, and the like; to go shopping, to hire servants, to act as chaperone, to gossip with, and to fetch and carry for society. So, she made herself useful to her narrow world, and it rewarded her as generously as it could in return.

Lelia Aus der Schlogl was a gold mine to Jean Grey, and she made herself as indispensable to that lady as she possibly could. There was nothing about her that she did not understand, at least she fancied there was not, and that is half the battle with folk of her ilk.

As far as she was able she endeavored to advance that lady's interests socially, and it is to her credit to say that she had succeeded rather well up to a certain point. Lelia was in her debt, and sufficiently generous to acknowledge that fact in graceful and substantial ways. Everything in her power she did for this social sponsor of hers; so in that respect there could be no complaints.

Jean looked forward to doing a good deal for Grace, so she tried to ingratiate herself in that quarter too. And it was not at all a difficult feat, for the girl found much to admire in the gay, erratic butterfly of society, and readily yielded to the innumerable advances and efforts to please.

Several days after the embarrassing talk with Don, Jean Grey was spending the day at the house on Madison square. It was a stormy, winter day, and she had run in, she said, to find relief from herself. If the truth were known, she came to enjoy the warmth and glow and comfort of the handsome, spacious house, and a delicious luncheon, with either Zinfandel or Röderer, sure to be served at noon.

She passed the day in Grace's sitting-room in gossip about everything under the sun, and time went with rapidity.

It was but a matter of course that Don should come under the harrow with the rest. He was by far too picturesque and conspicuous to escape that fate.

"And what of Prince Charming?" Lelia asked carelessly from her nest of silken pillows on the Turkish lounge; "he has not been near us for an age."

"He was here last week," Grace said; "surely you have not forgotten?"

"Last week! why, that is an age—for him. He used to come to this house every other day. Have you seen him anywhere, Jean dear?"

Mrs. Grey did not answer at once. She sat in her rocker, her arms back of her head, musing.

"What are you mooning over?" her friend inquired, with a laugh; "come, out with it, sauce-box!"

"I am thinking of this young man, and in a general way of the male biped."

"Well, what of man? You no doubt can give a new view of him."

"'The Maker poured an angel in a pan,
And told the great Michael he might try his skill
At sub-creating—Michael mused him still,
And his white hand through his white feathers ran.
He then of light and sweetness took a span,
A handful of clean dirt threw in at will,
Talk, and tobacco, lots of pluck and skill,
And stirred with melted angel in the pan.
All these ingredients then he set to tan
Full fairly in the sun, upon a hill;
And mused him long and said, "Create I can,
But having made, what shall I call this pill?
—Both more and less than angels in its plan:
I will add lots of *pie,* and call the mixture *Man.*"'"

"Who dared to perpetrate that?" Grace asked, with mock indignation.

"Oh, a woman—of course; the western woman, who wrote so well about Dollard and Tonty."

"But, Jean, I fail to see the connection. What

bearing has this on Don? Do you for an instant imagine that he would eat pie? I know he would not."

"You asked me if I had seen him. I have. It was on the eve of his departure."

"His departure!"

"Yes. He has gone away. You may well be astonished. He has left town in the midst of the maddest whirl. And the Lenten season is still some time off. It worried me for a whole day."

"You amaze me, more and more. I fancied you did not like Don."

"I do not. I do not like the mysterious. We know nothing about him."

"Can it be possible!"

"It is, much to my vexation. I have tried hard to find out who, and what he is, and why he is here."

"Have you never gained any information that satisfied you?"

"A little—here and there. The moment I learned he was going away I grew suspicious, and did not rest until I discovered something. That is the way with women."

"You really did succeed this time! This is positively exciting. Go on; do not keep me in suspense."

"His establishment up town is broken up, and the lady is alone for the present, and for good, as far as he is concerned. That is one piece of news."

"Are you not joking? Who has fooled you to this extent?"

"I am not permitted to give the name. But my information is reliable. The flat is empty; the *menage* is *non est*. Don has left town, temporarily, I suppose,

though on this point I cannot offer reliable evidence."

Grace listened in silence.

"But can you not tell us whither the gay fellow has gone?" her sister-in-law asked, in her bantering way.

"He has gone south. You know he is originally from the far south."

"I have heard something of the kind once or twice before."

"I know he is, for I have traced his career as far as Memphis."

"How indefatigable you are in everything you undertake!"

"Yes; I myself think I am. I never let go. I do not care for this young man, and I mean to know who he is before I am done with him."

"What has he done to you?" Grace asked quietly.

"Nothing. He could not do anything to me. I simply want to see him as he is. The New York part is only a part. There is more behind, you may be sure."

"We think him a charming fellow, and hope he will return to New York soon."

"That is the general wish."

"Jean, tell us what you really do know about Don. It will be delightful to listen to you this dreary afternoon."

"I should like to amuse you, Lelia, if I could, but there is very little that I can tell. Everybody is familiar with his career at the university, and in Europe, and finally in this city. I, however, try to go further back than any of these periods in his life. We are all aware of the amount of his wealth, how it came to him, and how it is invested."

"Wait, I am not sure that we are. Please inform us."

"I am not inquisitive," Grace put in; "I do not care for such details. It is nothing to me."

"Well, I am at Memphis at present. I find that his parents, estimable people, died one after the other in a yellow fever epidemic, leaving him a large estate. The executors of the will, or rather the guardian of the boy, invested much of the money in Montana, Washington, and Minneapolis realty. The investments were judicious and timely, and he is now nearly a multi-millionaire. Some persons are born under a lucky star."

"So his parents are dead!" Grace said softly.

"Yes. He was a youngster at the time, so he cannot know what the loss was. The guardian is living. He it is whom Don has left town to see."

"How clever you are! You ought to be a Russian, Jean dear."

"Thank you. I have no desire to experience a Siberian exile. I am content as I am."

"But where did you learn so much about this beau? And how are we to tell what is true and what is false? Are you sure of what you say?".

"Every bit is true," came the answer, with a little frown; "I will not allow you to question my veracity."

"You must tell me more then, as you gather your facts; for I am interested in him, as much as the rest. We are fast friends, and what is learned about those we like is of interest. Of course, a man like this one must have more or less of the romantic in his life."

"I will post you from time to time. I hope to glean further in the field, before I quit it. Mrs. Duncan, I

am told that you are a veritable musician. I confess that I should never have thought it. You do not look like the fraternity a wee bit. Tell me, what do you think of this? I am trying to set a poem to music—for filthy lucre's sake."

And in a sweet, though thin, treble she sang:

"'Over and over the fragrant clover,
The bees went humming till late,
And where is the laddy, and what luck had he
A-wooing his blithesome mate?
O hey, O ho!
They walk so slow,
Brown Robin and blushing Bess;
But what did he say in the wood to-day?
I think I will leave you to guess,
Dear heart,
I think I will leave you to guess.'"

"Let us go down stairs," her hostess said, rising; "and run over the song with the piano. I will show a way to improve the refrain. As it is, it sounds very taking indeed. You are really clever. I had no idea you were musical."

"I have been at the piano all my life. And lately I have thought I could write a song that would strike the public, if I tried. Sometimes a solitary woman has achieved that distinction. Why not I? I intend at least to try. One cannot do less, eh?"

This was the way to win the girl, and no one knew it better than Jean Grey. She had not been studying her subject for nothing.

Lelia did not follow them to the reception-room,

having an order to give Sauerwein about sewing and desire to see what Elsie was doing upstairs.

So for a few minutes the two women were together. Grace stood leaning against the end of the piano listening as the prelude to the ballad was played. After a succession of showy chords, the player stopped, wheeled around, and looked up into her listener's face.

"Before I go on," she said quickly; "I want to say I had an object in what I said about Don upstairs. My object is this: I do not wish your sister-in-law to become infatuated with him. I know she can do better, if she cares to try matrimony again. Can I ask you to help me?"

"My dear Mrs. Grey, I do not know what to say. Please tell me what you would like to have me do."

"I would have you discourage his visiting this house so much. I would have you help me, and also Lelia in another way, which I will show you some other time. Don is not the man for her. You must admit that."

"I cannot understand your dislike of him."

"Believe me, there is something wrong about any man or woman who works so hard to be popular and to be above reproach. I suspect this man. If he were all right he would not care so much about being a leader and being with only foremost persons. He would be there without effort. It would be his due. But this man is totally unknown. He comes here, and, by deliberate hard work, and cleverness, makes himself the centre of the best. For all we know he may not be entitled to the name he proudly bears. He may be of mixed blood. The south is so far away."

That dreadful suspicion was uttered in a whisper,

and Jean Grey appeared to feel it keenly; but it struck her listener as the height of absurdity. She laughed outright in the speaker's face.

"Come, begin the song," she said, quieting down; "it will be pleasanter to me than the eternal Chauncey Don. I am weary of the very name. Do not think that there is danger for any of our family as far as he is concerned. I do not believe Lelia thinks of him in the way you intimate. He is only an agreeable acquaintance—nothing more. It scarcely matters to us who, or what he is. Now, begin."

And the song was begun forthwith.

XVIII

And did it not matter to her who and what Don was? Was she sincere with herself when she said that?

She had no sooner uttered the unfeeling remark than conscience smote her, and she began to think. After awhile she found that it did matter. She was touched at the evident desire to be a better and purer man. He had not hesitated to cut his moorings to the old ways, and she had been instrumental in awakening the sense of right and honor. He heard; he obeyed. There was something frank and honest and noble in his readiness to hear and obey. She was a woman; she was both flattered and touched by what he had done. The past was forgiven him, and he was reinstated in favor. She desired to see him again; she wondered what his life was, who his friends were, and what he did with his beautiful days. And then around him grew charming speculations and romantic ideas, until at last just the sound of his name awakened an eager interest. It was no longer wearisome to her ears.

It was some time before he called, but when he did, he came with animation, and, if possible, a more engaging presence than ever. He was resplendent. His tailor must have been proud of him.

It was an afternoon call, and he found nobody in, save the mistress of the house. This was what he wanted. He was aware that Lelia was out. That happened to be a special day at the Academy of Design, and he had seen Lelia going there in irreproach-

able array with her picturesque little daughter. It was but a mere step or two round to the house on Madison square, and by some lucky chance Mrs. Duncan might be at home.

She was, and the butler looked unusually well-pleased to see him, and to announce him. Presently he heard her coming. He rose, with hat and cane in hand, to greet her. It did not seem credible that it was the same woman of ten days ago. Her manner was perfect, and the quaint, and somewhat rustic air which he had thought so unusual and attractive was quite gone. In its place he saw the city air, the elegance of a woman of the world, and the dress of the provinces was a thing of the past. She stood before him in a famous dressmaker's tasteful creation for the house.

"I am glad to see you," she said, holding out her hand; "I welcome you back to New York, and to my home."

He looked straight into her eyes with the bright glance characteristic of him, without seeing the extended hand. Was it intentional or not? She let her hand fall, and motioning him to a seat, sought the lounge at the opposite side of the room.

"I am alone," she announced; "Lelia has gone to see the Vassili Verestchagin paintings for the hundredth time. I have gone until I have the horrors whenever I see or hear his name. It is a clever idea to show the 'Angelus' in the same collection, is it not? It is like balm after torture."

Yes, she had changed. She knew how to sit on a lounge, how to hold her hands, and how to talk, and, looking at her critically, he detected the influence of

Lelia Aus der Schlogl and Jean Grey. And he considered it admirable in its way.

"Where have you been?" she continued, in her lightest manner; "your departure was sudden, unexpected. You should have seen our amazement when Mrs. Grey told us—and our regret. You have been missed."

His glance never left her face.

"Do you forgive me?" he asked.

"Forgive you! Why, what have you done?"

"Will you not be frank with me again? I am grateful for what you did during my last call."

She flushed and looked down at her hands.

"Pray do not mention it."

"But I must—this once. Afterwards it shall not be alluded to again. I have buried my past. I have tried to do what you would have me do. I am not living as I used to live. I broke it all up, and I went home for awhile. I am going to live differently, and I shall try to be worthy of taking your hand in greeting in the future."

"You have been home?"

"Yes; that is, I have been in Memphis. That is as much home as any place, I suppose. I was there a few years when a boy, but have never lived there since. I go occasionally to see some one who has been kind and good to me."

"I am glad you went. It no doubt did you good."

"It made me think. I have thought of my life more seriously than I have ever done before. And I thank you for it."

"You must not blame me."

"I do not. I thank you instead, and I am grateful that you came into my life in this way. You cannot know what I feel to-day. I see how useless and idle and bad I was, and I am anxious to do all I can in reparation. I am going to be a different man hereafter."

"I am glad to hear you say it," she remarked, with a strange feeling at her heart.

"I am not going to live for the things I once loved. I am going to be a man and make my life good and useful to others."

She sat with her head lowered. She could not speak.

"I am young. I have ability. Do you not think I may become something worthy, if I make the effort?"

"You are capable of noble things," she said, not daring to lift her eyes; "I think every human being is. The time will come when the world will respect, perhaps revere, your name."

"Nothing has arisen in my existence before to make me a thoughtful man. I have been looked upon as a gay fellow by society, and been petted and spoiled. But a change has come. I am no longer satisfied with the fripperies of society, and am going to give them up. I feel that a man ought to be above such things. You have made me think."

"Do you hold me responsible?" she asked, not looking up, while she felt herself tremble.

"I certainly do. No woman has dared to take the stand with me that you have. On the contrary women have undone me. Do you not see how it has been? I have had no family ties; I have had no good influences in my life. There was money, no restraint, and I have

been led hither and thither. I do not say that it has been against my will. No; I have liked my life, and yielded to every phase of it. I cannot lay the blame at any one's door. I alone am at fault. I must be just and true in all I say."

Grace looked up. She was afraid, but she felt he had said enough, there were misgivings over her listening to him. Was it right to listen to him? She did not know how to stop him, or how to get away, and as it was she had betrayed an unusual interest and agitation during the conversation. What would he think of her? Had she been immodest in listening to him?

These queries flashed through her mind, and brought indescribable discomfort. For a moment she reclined against the silken pillows of the lounge with an overpowering sensation of helplessness. If somebody would but come, thereby bringing her the means of escape and relief! But there was no sign of deliverance anywhere.

"Do not look so troubled," he begged; "I assure you, you have done nothing with which to upbraid yourself. Believe me, I am grateful. I shall endeavor, from this day on, to be worthy of your regard. I could kneel at your feet, and thank you for what you have done for me."

"But you must not!" she exclaimed, terrified, and rising in confusion; "I have done nothing. I do beg you to let the matter drop."

"I will. And will you be my friend?—the kind of friend that I need more than any one else?"

"The way to gain a friend is to be one. Did not

Michelet say that?" and she rallied sufficiently to look into his eyes with a faint smile.

"You make me so happy."

"We will be friends, and I will do all that lies in my power to help you. Let me say that I value your trusting me, that I appreciate your confidence. It shall not be abused."

"I have no reason to think it will be. You are a good woman."

"I try to be that. I am sure most of us try to be good."

"Do you believe in God and in prayer?"

"Oh, yes! Do not you?"

"Then remember me in your prayers."

"I will. And you shall go to church with us."

Then to her inexpressible relief she heard the butler go to the front door to admit some one. The next thing she heard was Elsie's voice. How sweet it sounded!

"There is Lelia!" she cried; "and you must stay to dinner, and we shall have one of our delightful evenings once more. How pleased Mr. Duncan will be! You will stay? Say yes!"

"If you wish me to do so—yes, with the greatest pleasure."

In a moment Lelia came in, holding her daughter's hand. The winter air had tinted her face with exquisite color, and she was unusually attractive.

"Whitacre gave me the good news," she said, standing on the threshold, the portiere making a rich background for her loveliness; "and of course we could not wait. Elsie, you may kiss Mr. Don. Your tender years will permit that dear privilege."

The child in her black silk hood and cloak presented a quaint figure. She went up to him, and looked into his face gravely.

"Herr Don, you will kiss me three times if you please!"

"Elsie!"

"Three times, yes. One for Frau Tante, one for Frau Mama, and one for me. Is not that *vornehm?* I want to be *vornehm.*"

He laughed heartily and, catching her in his arms, kissed her with considerable satisfaction.

"Shall you kiss that way when we are wedded?" she asked, on being released.

"Elsie!"

"But my dear, Herr Don and I have long ago arranged that we should be married. He is waiting for me. Did you not know? I said yes when he asked me, and he told me that he should see you, and get your consent. I am his *braut.* I do love him dearly."

"Did he give you a ring?"

"He did. I wear it on my heart." And to the consternation of Don and the amusement of the others she, after awhile, succeeded in extracting from the bosom of her frock a ring suspended on a ribbon round her neck.

"See, here it is—my lovely ring!"

"This is too much," her mother said, with mock gravity; "I must not give my consent to anything that savors of a clandestine nature. My life as a mother is trying enough, without that element. No, Elsie, I was not aware of your engagement, and I should not have allowed it. I do not approve of this

arrangement at all. I have a more enchanting future for my little girl. I disannul the betrothal. But you may retain the ring as a memento of a bold, bad young man."

The child did not know whether to cry or laugh. She looked at her *fiancé* appealingly.

"Do not give me up, my darling," he said, mischievously; "you had better be my wife than any other relation."

"I will never give you up, *Geliebter,*" she said soberly; "we shall meet again. It is only *aufwiedersehen,* is it not?

"Do not be silly," her mother said, laughing; "but go to Whitacre, and tell him for your aunt that Mr. Don dines with us, and go to Sauerwein. Here take my coat and hat with you. Tell Sauerwein that you are to come to dessert, if your aunt will be so kind as to have you this evening. You have been good to-day."

Grace nodded her head in consent, and the child ran out of the room with beaming face. As soon as she was gone the three burst into laughter, and that placed them upon familiar footing again—at least it made Don feel at home.

XIX

A CHARMING week followed, made up of drives, dinners, theatre parties, two delightful small dances, and several Broadway strolls, in all of which Don took part. It was sparkling winter weather, and the city was in holiday mood. New York was never more attractive or more lively, and it was but natural that these four persons should form a part of the general jollity, and should enjoy a portion of the best offered in the way of diversion.

Grace was like a child in her pleasure and abandon. It was a treat to witness her enjoyment of everything in her present delightful surroundings. She bloomed under these genial conditions into an entertaining woman, and an admirable companion. Ready and quick to enjoy, each point was seized at once, and the most made of it. She accepted her part in the world, and played it with dainty, deft touch. Lelia spent money for her, and saw that she presented a rich figure wherever she went. Between that lady and Sauerwein there could be no mistakes in dress.

She honestly liked the fuss and the parade, because she had never had them in her life before. It was stimulating, and irresistible to be the central figure in a circle, however small that circle was, and she yielded to the situation with the grace and beauty of young womanhood. What woman—what man for that matter—does not relish adulation? Who is not pleased to be loved, to be considered, to be appealed to, to be courted, to be admired?

Here were Duncan loving her with all the fervor of his strong manhood, and Lelia paying her every delicate attention which a woman of the world has at her fingertips, and Don showing a friendly regard. No wonder the world was rosy and jocund to a girl who had never before been blessed in any of these enchanting phases of life. They were hers now, and she basked in them to her heart's content.

It is just when poor mortals forget their weary round and for a brief moment taste unalloyed felicity, that the serpent darts hissing forward, bites, and awakens one to bitter realities. No long dreams are ever vouchsafed man, and this is but a briery world at best.

In the midst of her happiness came Grace's sting. It happened at the close of the week, as they were one evening leaving a notable *café*. A couple of entrancing hours had passed at the playhouse, and afterward they had some delicacies at the *café*, over which they talked with no little animation and repartee. Lelia and her brother were at the moment some distance in advance. Don was assisting Grace with her wrap, a gorgeous affair of crimson and gold and white fur, which was as yet too new a thing to be altogether a joy and a comfort. A touch, a look, a word, from Don—and she was wide awake. There could be no more dreaming for her.

She looked at him. He returned the look with interest. She was not mistaken; she had heard aright; he meant what he had done. It was a deliberate insult.

She trembled, and looked down.

There could be no other explanation of his action,

unless the Jungfraumilch, which they had drunk, were responsible. He had insulted her! It seemed as if the guests and waiters in the *café* must be cognizant of the outrage. Her cheeks flamed; her heart throbbed with violence; her hands shook. She did not know what to do. Her husband and sister-in-law were ahead of her; she could not attract their attention, without placing herself in a conspicuous position; she would be forced to suffer Don's company to the carriage in waiting. And every second with him was contamination, horror, and disappointment.

Was it possible? She must be in a nightmare; this was some hideous fancy. So she kept saying to herself, over and over again, as she moved across the wide shining space by his side. Of course people were staring, and everybody must know what the man had done to her. She should never be able to go out in public again. It was all over—this pleasant idling and dreaming of hers. The change had come at last. Good things always do come to an end. And she had so few.

He did not speak. She would not.

Duncan and Lelia were waiting for them in the corridor. She did not hear what was being said. She hurried towards the carriage, and was glad to have her husband put her into it out of the glare of the hotel lights.

"I shall be around some time to-morrow, Mrs. Duncan," she heard Don call out; "according to promise. Good night everybody, and pleasant dreams!"

The next moment they left him standing at the curbstone. She leaned against her husband, and felt him put an arm about her with indescribable comfort. He

rested his head on hers. In front of them gleamed the rare white loveliness of Lelia.

"Dear heart!" Duncan murmured, kissing his wife; "what an agreeable evening we had! I shall always remember it with pleasure. Everything was so jolly. And dear, old Don—I never knew him to be more engaging. One cannot help loving him. He was at his best to-night."

She wondered what his worst could be.

Lelia was silent.

From the *café* to their home was a short way, but the drive thither gave her opportunity to think over what she ought to do in regard to the man's misbehavior. She decided that she would not speak of it, at least for the present. The revelation would spoil their lovely evening, and in her fresh indignation she might say more than she ought. It would be better to wait, to think the matter over as carefully and calmly as possible, and then find some effective means of putting him in his proper place. There was of course no excuse for him. He had gone beyond bounds, and violated every canon of honor and good breeding. She did not recall a single look or act on her part that could have given him provocation for committing this insult.

Was this his manner of giving up former evil ways and being a better and purer man? Was this doing good to others? Was this the right course towards worthiness? She did not believe in him now, and that interview, during which he seemed so noble, so honest, so manly, was after all nothing but a farce. He had simply fooled her to the utmost of which he was capable, and probably had many a laugh at her expense.

How blind she had been! He would not dare to come to her house to-morrow. That was a bit of bravado, characteristic of the fellow. He was daring her. He was not ashamed of what he had done. No, he gloried in it, up to the last, and it was this that made it so terrible. She could have forgiven him, if he were penitent, but he was not. His glance burned her, until it was unbearable. She had never seen such an expression before. That look alone was insulting.

He had placed his hand upon her shoulder, and with that in his eyes, he said to her—"dearest!" He had no right to do it, and she felt humiliated, insulted, and at the same time indignant. The memory of it was degrading. It mattered little that lookers-on saw nothing further than a gentleman assisting a lady with her wrap, a radiant smile, and a bent head. She felt that the whole world must know what he had done to her. To sleep that night was an impossibility. The remaining hours were given up to going over and over every phase of their acquaintance, from his introduction to her to the episode in the *café*, in order to discover in what particular she had erred in word, look or deed, with this man. But she found nothing with which to reproach herself.

Her husband was gone, Lelia was not visible, and she was in the library lying down, when Don came the next morning.

She did not hear the bell. The library was in the rear of the house, somewhat isolated. It was noon-tide.

She was wearied out by loss of sleep and much thinking. It was good to be there in the shadowy corner of the library where no sounds penetrated, and rest. She

felt secure from interruption. No one saw her seek the library, and there were no callers at this time of the day. Here she could be alone and at peace for a few hours.

There was a knock at the door. Before she could answer, it was opened, and to her amazement she saw the man standing there. He came in, and closed the door. She half rose from the lounge, speechless with surprise.

"You must see me," he said, and the tone of his voice was imperative; "nobody save the butler knows that I am in the house."

"I do not wish to see you. Your presence is an intrusion, an impertinence, a second insult."

"You must hear me," he said, and she saw how white he was, and relented. He had been so kind, so winsome, so gallant, and they had been happy together. But all that was over; those times could never return. He had forfeited them by a most unfortunate impulse, and their old relationship was forever destroyed.

"I do not come to beg your pardon. I meant what I said last night."

Could she be dreaming? She rose and, leaving the lounge, stood with tightly-clasped hands. She turned as pale as Don.

"There is no excuse. I do not pretend to deceive you."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this, and nothing else—I love you! I love you!"

Oh, the passion with which he said that! It fairly burned her. The words struck her as so many blows.

Her face grew paler and yet paler, and she held her hands tighter together. She could barely stand.

"I love you," he reiterated in a whisper, fine but penetrating.

"What have I done that you should degrade me so?" she asked in a half-stifled voice; "what have I done? Tell me—tell me!"

"You have smiled on me; you have talked with me; you have had me with you; you have made me part of your every-day life. And I love you. I have loved you from the beginning."

"Do you mean to say that I have led you on?"

"Yes, in a measure. I cannot keep my love back. Have you not seen it all along? I am yours."

"You must be mad!"

"I am mad with love for you. But I know that you care for me."

"I will not deny it—I did like you. We have liked you better than anybody else, but that is over now. The end has come."

"You have told Duncan!"

The look was so strange, so terrible, with which he accompanied the exclamation that she shook beneath it.

"No, I have not," she said, involuntarily; "but I shall do so as soon as he returns. Do you suppose I would keep a disgraceful thing like this from my husband?"

He said nothing.

"I shall tell him," she went on, gathering strength; "this is too horrible to be concealed. You are a wicked man. But because you are, you must not think others bad. I deny having led you on in the slightest man-

ner. I will not allow you to accuse me. I am guiltless of what you dare to charge me with. I found you on an intimate footing in this household, and, accepting you as a gentleman and a friend, I accorded you interest and regard. Will you venture to say anything of me which is foreign to that?"

He was silent.

"I am bitterly disappointed in you. You have the traits of an honorable gentleman: it would be but an easy matter for you to be one. Only the other day you spoke to me in a way that made me think there was something truly noble in you. Why did you deceive me? What was your object? You must have had an object."

Don would not speak.

"I am at a loss to account for your conduct. You must be beside yourself. What will my husband and Lelia say when I go to them? How shall I account for your conduct? Oh, do you not realize what you have done?"

A pause.

She moved a step forward.

"Let me pass," she said, with a proud gesture of the head; "I do not wish to prolong a call which should not have been paid, and which is but another affront. You have forgotten yourself a second time. I shall see that the servant does not admit you again."

He did not move, but looked her full in the face with the expression which hurt her so.

"The hour will come," he said deliberately; "when you will regret what you say to me to-day. And you will recall the fact that I love you. You know that

you are fond of me, but at any time you may find me. My address is the Albemarle. Come when you will."

He stepped aside.

She looked him over from head to foot with scorn.

"Coward!" she said, and with that parting shot she left the room. Upstairs, alone, locked in her own rooms, she threw herself on the bed with a sharp cry. And then tears came to her relief.

By mere chance it happened that Lelia saw from one of her windows the handsome form of Don coming across the square towards their house. She went down stairs to meet him. There had been a disputed point about a new dance between herself and Jean Grey, and she thought of appealing to Don, who was an acknowledged authority upon these matters.

At the foot of the staircase she met the butler, who informed her that Mr. Don wished to see her in the library where he was at present with Mrs. Duncan.

Between the library and the dining-room there was a small, dark passage. Instead of entering by the main door, she sought the library by the second entrance. She did not get beyond the passage. Here she paused, for the magic word, love, sounded through the door, and held her spellbound. She heard the man declare his passion for her sister-in-law, that he had been encouraged in it; that something terrible had been done. She heard no more, for a strange thing occurred.

She fainted, and falling down, lay in a soft heap on the floor. When she had recovered consciousness, all was silence. She was still in the small, dark passage, lying on the floor. The voices had ceased. Don was gone.

XX

THAT day was one of Duncan's early days. Towards three o'clock he came home. Grace did not expect him so soon, and when he entered her sitting-room, she looked up with a startled cry. He appeared bright and happy as he stood on the threshold, smiling at her pale face. There came in with him a sweet, fresh smell of the sunny winter weather outside. He stood there so strong, so fair and handsome.

He held out his arms, and without a word she went to him.

"Are you not glad to see me?" he whispered, rubbing his cheek against hers; "I have been thinking of you all day, and I could not stay away from you any longer. Dear heart, how I love you!"

She could not speak.

"Everything I saw—everything I did spoke of you. And at last I gave up the struggle, and ran from the office. I wanted you."

He drew her close to him, and she felt his heart beat.

"I have told Ogden to get the team ready. It is a glorious afternoon, and a drive in the exhilarating air will do us both a world of good."

He kissed her on the eyes.

"Have you been moping? Or have you wanted me?"

"A little of each," she said, with a deep sigh.

"What has gone wrong?"

"Oh, several things."

"Come, tell me, here—heart to heart."

"I have received a letter from Colorado for one thing," she said at random, to gain time and to collect her thoughts.

"Well, that ought not to bring on the blue devils," he laughed; "I thought all was rose-hued out there. What is the matter? And why do they trouble you? I fancied they would leave you alone when they got what they wanted."

"There is nothing wrong in Colorado, I assure you. On the contrary everything is, as you say, rose-hued. Cecily is most happy and Tejon is, from her accounts, a model husband."

"What has happened then? Has Mrs. Larch written you?"

"She has. You may read the letter. She has written for my consent to her marriage."

"Phew!"

"Yes, a three-times millionaire out there wants to marry her, and she writes to say, that she will let him do so, if none of her family object. Cecily and Tejon are willing, and approve of it, and she wants our consent."

"Let us wire her to-night to go ahead with our best wishes and blessing. And we shall send her a royal bridal gift. This is good news." And he laughed heartily over it.

"But, dear, something else bothers you. Out with it, old lady! Come, whisper it in my ear."

He pressed his ear to her lips, laughing softly as he did so.

She hesitated.

"You have been crying," he said, looking straight into her eyes; "I see tell tale traces. Oh, you silly, silly woman! Tell me all about it."

And, seeing that she would not speak, he took her head between his hands, looked her squarely in the face with his clear, glance, and laughed. It was a dear, happy laugh.

She gazed into the fair face, deep down into the grey eyes, with a responsive smile.

"Dear," he said with mock solemnity, and kissing her between the words; "the principal element in the composition of a tear is water. The other elements are salt, soda, phosphate of soda, and mucus, each in small proportions. A dried tear seen through a microscope of average power represents a peculiar appearance. The water, after evaporation, leaves behind it the saline ingredients, which amalgamate. and form themselves into lengthened cross lines, and look like a number of minute fish bones. The makeup is the same whether the tears are for joy or grief. The tears are secreted in what are called the 'lachrymal glands,' situated over the eyeball, and underneath the lid. The contents of these glands are carried along and under the inner surface of the eyelids by the means of six or seven fine channels, and are discharged a little above the cartilage supporting the lid. The discharge of tears from the lachrymal glands is not occasional and accidental, as is commonly supposed, but continuous. It goes on both day and night—though less abundantly

at night—through the conduits, and spreads equally over the surface of the lids. After serving its purpose, the flow is carried away by two drains, situated in that corner of each eye nearest the nose, into which they run, and are called the 'lachrymal points.' Now, do you comprehend that you have an erudite husband, and that it is the sheerest folly to attempt to deceive him?"

"Where did you gain your learning? I do not believe it is anything but that which you have read somewhere."

"You iconoclast! Do you question my erudition? Am I not learned?"

Somebody knocked on the door at this juncture.

He looked up with impatience. He did not like being interrupted. He sighed, strained Grace to his side, and went reluctantly across the room to the door. On opening it he found one of the servants standing in the hall.

"What is it?" he demanded abruptly.

"Mrs. Aus der Schlogl would like to see you, if it is convenient, sir."

"Very well, after awhile."

"She told me to say it was important: that she must see you at once."

"Say that I will join her immediately."

He closed the door, and went back to his wife.

"Is Lelia ill? She was not at luncheon, and I have not seen her since morning. I got the impression that she was out."

"We will resume our discussion, dear, some other time. But meanwhile get ready for the drive. I will

be back in a few minutes. I shall tell her to wait."

He took her again into his arms, and held her so for a moment in silence.

Grace made her toilette, after which she sat down upon the lounge near one of the front windows, and while putting on her gloves gazed out at the blue sky smiling overhead, at the bare trees in the square, and the busy, innumerable sparrows hopping about and chirping in the Lord's good light. Beyond the square she saw Fifth avenue and Broadway dense and black with people and vehicles. The rush and roar came to her where she sat.

Time passed. The light in the west grew brighter, and fell in rays over the floor of the room.

"The interview is lengthy," she mused; "it must have been important. I trust nothing is amiss. We cannot drive far. It is too late."

The western light got rosier and rosier. The sparrows kept up their hopping and chirping, and the city sang its muffled song.

At last she heard footfalls. She knew her husband's tread. In amaze she detected a difference in the sound. He had a buoyant step, but now it was slow and heavy. He came along the hall, as though something might be the matter with him. That was the first inkling she had of change. With apprehension she turned, and watched the door.

It was opened slowly. He entered with lagging steps. She scarcely suppressed an exclamation at sight of his face.

It was altered. It was gray and drawn and old, and in each lineament she read grief and horror.

She rose, intending to stand, but fell back, with a cry. At that moment her usually fine physical strength deserted her, leaving her limbs weak and powerless. She saw at a glance that some frightful thing had happened. Her heart beat so violently she almost suffocated. What had taken place? Why was he so altered? Had some accident befallen his sister or Elsie?

She locked her shaking hands convulsively together. The action made her rally, and lent courage for the moment; but she knew that a blow was about to fall.

"Shall we not drive to-day?" she asked, with a mighty effort.

"We are too late for driving," he answered, vacantly looking at the slanting rays of sunset light that fell from the windows; "the sun has set. Night is almost here."

His voice was usually mellow and distinct—a beautiful voice, capable of varied expression. But it had changed; it was hollow and tired and old, quite another voice. Each tone knocked pitilessly against her heart.

With dilated eyes she waited for him to speak. If it were in the power of a human being to offer her everlasting youth, beauty, wealth and pleasure combined in a supreme gift for one syllable in exchange at that moment, she could not have complied. Speech forsook her, as physical strength had done—speech the most unreliable of all things, the basest of traitors to man, in emergency.

He stood in the centre of the room, looking at but past her, oblivious to the pause that followed his

remark. Presently he stirred; he trembled; and throwing his arms upward he moaned, as if overburdened with a load of grief.

"I have had a talk with my sister," he said at length, pronouncing the words with difficulty.

He struck his hands, and moved a step forward.

"Do you know what she told me? Can you imagine the damnable thing?"

"No," Grace answered feebly, after a stupendous effort to find her voice; "what is it?"

"When I think of it my brain reels, and I feel that I am going mad. Oh, Grace! Oh, God! Oh, my wife!"

Before she guessed his intention he rushed forward, and fell at her feet. He enclosed his arms about her knees. He raised his altered face up to hers.

"Is it true?" he asked in so low a tone that even she whose ears were strained in agony to catch every sound almost failed to hear these.

"What?"

"Was he here?"

"Who?"

"Don."

An incoherent ejaculation dropped from her parched lips. She pushed him from her, and fell back. She trembled, and hid her face from him.

He shook her, and in an awful voice she heard him say:

"Answer me, as you hope God to pardon your soul."

"What do you want me to say?"

"Was Don with you this morning?"

"He was."

There was a fearful cry. Duncan sprang to his feet, and ran to a cabinet that stood in a corner of the room. A drawer was pulled out and shut. At the sound she stretched her hands as if seeking support, and essayed to speak, but in vain. The words would not come.

The sunset tints had faded away, and it was twilight. The room was shadowy, and the friendly darkness partially hid her husband's tortured face as he spoke to her.

"I might have known that you and I could not be happy together, I old and you young. He is more suited to you, and this is the inevitable. But I love you better than the whole world, and I was willing to take you, though I knew that you did not love as I loved. I believed you would. There is always hope when one wants one's own way. I hoped you would learn to love me as I wanted to be loved."

All this seemed a part of a frightful dream. It could not be real. She would yet awake to find that she had been dreaming there alone in the dusk. Was not God good and kind?

Duncan moved to the door.

She sprang to her feet, and extended her hands in order to detain him. She must speak. An awful thought had flashed across her mind. What had he taken from the drawer of the cabinet? She remembered seeing a pistol lying there not long since.

Would he harm himself?

"Where are you going?" she asked, finding her voice at last; "what is the matter?"

"I am going out on business. I will hear you later on."

"Hear me?"

"Yes."

"But what have I done? Why are you so cold, so strange, so changed?"

"You know the cause."

"I do not."

"Do not attempt to deceive me. You have already convicted yourself."

"Of what? That Mr. Don was here this morning? Yes, I admit that. But what is wrong in that?"

"Enough! I will come back, and show you what I have done!"

And casting a horrified glance at her, he rushed through the room, flung the door open, and ran along the corridor. She heard him hurry down the stairs, and the front door close with a loud noise in its place.

With indefinable feelings Grace stood where he left her, trying to grasp what had occurred. She suddenly thought of her sister-in-law. In a minute she had lighted every gas jet in the room, and touched the bell.

Immediately the ring was answered by the butler.

"Mrs. Aus der Schlogl—say that I must see her at once. Hurry!"

"She is not in."

"Not in?"

"No. ma'am. She went out an hour ago with Elsie and the governess."

"Where?"

"To Mrs. Grey's."

"Send for her without delay. Say that I must see her. Do not return without her. Be quick!"

"Dinner is served."

"I do not wish dinner."

The butler went without betraying the faintest trace of surprise or curiosity, too well trained to forget his place. He, however, was aware that the entire household was disturbed, and that domestic matters were amiss.

In twenty minutes he came back to say that Mrs. Aus der Schlogl had gone with Mrs. Grey, and that no one could say where they were.

After receiving the message, Grace dismissed him and, throwing herself upon the lounge, she waited as patiently as she could. She determined to wait there, forever if need be, until somebody came that could explain and settle this affair.

XXI

DUNCAN had but one desire, as he left the house and hurried across the square, and that was to be with Don face to face for five minutes. He went directly to the hotel where the man lived.

The head clerk knew him, and came forward to serve him, with a smile. He was able to say that Don was not in the hotel, but in Yonkers, where he had gone to participate in a social function, and that under the circumstances his return to town that night was somewhat doubtful.

Duncan recalled having heard of this very entertainment, and the name of the hostess came readily to mind. And, bit by bit, he remembered various facts concerning the affair, in particular that Don was to lead the german with the young daughter of the house, who was one of the rosebud beauties of the season.

He left the hotel, and called a hansom to take him to the Grand Central depot. On arriving there, he encountered delay. He had missed his train; he was compelled to wait for the next. However, to the man who waits all things come, and this one bided time and opportunity with that patience which, absorbing purposes beget. He should see Don. They must meet—ay, they would meet. The hour of reckoning had come, and so a slight delay scarcely signified.

To find the home of so important a family was an

easy matter, especially on the night of a grand ball. It was a large, handsome house with spacious garden land around it, and in the dense growth of tree and bush it gleamed on the present occasion like a jewel. Lights flashed from every window, and strains of dance music floated out on the still, cold air.

He leaned against the iron railing, and looked at the guests arrive. Carriage after carriage rattled up in rapid procession, and a line of men and women stretched from the curbstone to the wide-open entrance, made attractive by exotics, and many lights.

At length with set lips he joined the crowd, and reached the door. Here he stopped, took out his card-case, wrote on a card, and giving it to one of the servants requested him to find Mr. Don immediately. A bill passed with the card lent the man alacrity in executing the errand.

But he did not have to wait.

The young man appeared at once, somewhat pale of face, but superb as to raiment. The beauty of his face and form was never more striking and remarkable. Duncan gazed at him standing there in the blaze of festive illuminations for a second in silence. The glance was returned with proud scorn. Don's eyes fairly shot forth contempt and defiance.

"You want to see me?" he asked in a cool, calm voice. His glance struck Duncan like a lash.

"I do. Step this way—outside—for a few minutes. I shall not detain you long."

Don beckoned to a servant and, on his coming, asked him to find a hat. The hat was found, and, stepping across the threshold he complied. There was not the

faintest trace of reluctance, dismay, nor fear—if anything, he seemed anxious to comply. Down the broad flight of stone stairs, past the coming guests, out of the grounds, and some distance along a side street they went in silence together. At the corner, where a street lamp was stationed, Duncan stopped. Here they were as much alone as though within the four walls of a room. To the right gleamed the great house, to the left the dimly-lighted homes of the neighborhood. The one sound was the orchestra.

The street lamp revealed the white, set faces of the men to one another. They stood close together, eye holding eye.

"Were you at my house this morning?" Duncan demanded in a low, even tone.

"Yes," was the answer, without a tremor in voice or face.

"You were with my wife?"

"I was."

"How long?"

"Some time. I did not time the call."

"What was the purport of your visit?"

No answer.

He grew paler, and drew near Don.

"You refuse to tell?"

No answer.

Like a flash he caught him by the throat and, holding him with the grip of death, pushed him against the lamp-post.

The young man did not quail, nor make an effort towards resistance. He was known far and near as one of the best athletes in New York; he was at any time

more than a match for Duncan, or any man his equal in height and weight, yet now he was strangely passive.

"Tell me what you did in my house this morning. You will have to speak!—or by God"—and he shook Don violently.

"Find out from your wife, if you want to know," came the half-stifled words, but the eyes did not fall from the face of the other; "would you ask me to betray a woman's favor?"

It seemed then as if the whole world went wrong to the husband. A frightful pain seized him at the heart.

"Devil!" he cried, tightening his clasp about the warm, firm throat; "Liar! Coward!"

"Who told you?" Don asked, with pain and difficulty.

"Lelia. She went to see you, and at the door overheard what you were saying."

Was it possible? There was actually a faint smile on his face at the information.

"It was to be expected," he said; "no woman brooks being supplanted."

"What do you mean?"

"Lelia was my mistress!"

This was a foul lie, told for a purpose, and it did its work.

A cry like that of a wounded animal came from Duncan. He let go his hold on the man's throat. In a moment Don felt the cold mouth of a pistol pressed against his temple. For him the next second meant death.

"Proof! Proof!" Duncan cried in an awful voice.

His face was enough to frighten the boldest nature,

but the fellow before him did not tremble. There was nothing unusual about him save the pallor of his countenance.

Don slipped his hand into his breast pocket, and extracted therefrom a letter. He held it out. The lamplight fell on the hand writing. It was Lelia's.

"This is the proof. For days I have carried it about so that you might have it at a moment's notice. Take it. I have done with it."

He thrust the letter into Duncan's left hand.

"Read, and learn for yourself what has been going on between your sister and me the past year."

The pistol clicked. The young man threw up his head, looked him straight in the eye.

"I am not afraid," he said; "shoot. Take that which you gave."

Duncan could not speak. His eyes demanded what the other meant.

"Have you forgotten Agnes Bell? I am her son—your bastard!"

The venom with which he spoke was indescribable.

Duncan staggered back with a hoarse cry. The pistol fell to the pavement.

"What! Will you not shoot? Have I not given you enough provocation?"

There was no reply to the taunts. The man stared at his son with dilated eyes.

"You really have forgotten! Of course you forgot. What was Agnes Bell to you? Will you say you were young, that men have these episodes in their lives? Perhaps you think that I have no right to hold you responsible or to seek revenge. But I am of a different

mind. I have suffered all my life, and I meant to pay you back."

He spoke with rapidity, with evident relief.

"This woman was young and good when you met her. True, she was poor, alone in the world, and in a measure defenceless. You persuaded her to give up her ill-paid drudgery in the country, and seek better pay in New York, where you could assist and befriend her. She followed your counsel. Did you assist and befriend her? Day by day you promised this chance and that; you took her about from one place of amusement to another, you loaned her money, and when she had grown to trust and love you, you made her pay the debt. Was anything said of marriage? Nothing definite, perhaps. Of course you could not marry a girl like that. Afterward she learned this, and what you meant to do by her. She disappeared. What became of her? Did you care? Did you hunt her up? Had you cared to search you might have found her on one of the free beds in the maternity ward of a city hospital where I—your son—first saw the light of day. But you did not care what became of her, and she might drift whither she would. It was nothing to you."

He raised his head with a gesture of scorn and contempt.

"I will tell you what became of her and myself. The physician in charge of the ward in which she brought me forth was interested in her. His interest developed into love, and, strange as it may seem, he married her. Quixotic, was it not? He married her, and, claimed me as his child—all for love of her. See what love will do—sometimes! This good man took

us away, to a part of the country in which we were unknown, and where we could grow up in honor. There he became famous and rich, and he and she were happy together. They died within a few hours of one another. I was left. I bear his name; I enjoy his money. I gave him the love I might have given you. But my mother did not keep me in ignorance as to my parentage. She wanted you and me to meet some day. She could not forget, and as soon as I was able to understand the story she told it. I know what she suffered and I know too what I have suffered."

He paused, and drew a deep breath. The weight which had lain upon him for years was lessening at last.

"Can you picture me brooding over this wrong? I had no father—I had no name. I was a social outcast. If the secret were divulged I should find life unendurable. What did I do? I studied, I traveled, I courted people, I became known. I forced the silly world to give all it had to give. I would go only with the best. And now I am welcomed everywhere. People seek me; they are glad to have me in their homes—I, a man without a name, and to-night in that rich house will be announced my engagement to the only child of the family. It is a family of wealth and place, with a name known in English and American history. I enter it, and I receive the dearest of their possessions. And they are proud over the alliance. Strange, is it not?"

Duncan shuddered. He turned deathly pale, and foamed at the mouth. He rushed forward, but before reaching his son, he fell down in a spasm.

"Lie in the dust," the young man said, spurning the

figure with his foot, and seeing a conscious look in the staring eyes, he continued: "I sought New York to win an enviable place, and eventually to meet you on your own ground. It took me six years to obtain what I wanted; then I found you. It was not difficult to ruin you. Now experience some of the shame my mother and I have had to bear all our lives."

A groan, a struggle to rise, and the prostrate man rolled over in the agony of horrible pain.

"Should you want me," the young man said distinctly, bending down to the ghastly face and writhing form; "you can see me at any time. You know where to find me. Had you taken my life, the hotel people would have discovered all. I left my papers so the truth might come out. Pray give my love to Lelia and Grace. I must leave you. My *fiancée* will miss me."

He hurried away. A low, agonized sound reached his ear. He stopped, and listened.

"Oh, God; my son!"

That was what he heard.

He laughed, and went on.

XXII

Hour after hour passed, and still Grace sat on the lounge watching and waiting. No Duncan. No Lelia. What could it mean? Oh, this terrible waiting!

Never in all her life had she experienced a night like this. There she sat motionless, wide-eyed.

At length, towards dawn, she dozed. Exhausted, outraged nature reasserted itself, and despite the glare of gas light and the uncomfortable position she slept. It was fitful sleep, disturbed by a dream in which she saw herself going along a familiar Tenbrook street to the Herr Professor's house. He was waiting for her. She felt his presence, she heard his voice. She saw the well-known music-room, the shabby furniture, the piano, the sheets of music and the opera scores. She heard him play. She heard herself sing *solfeggio*. After awhile he tried her in opera. She sang a recitative and an aria, and at the conclusion he wheeled round on the piano-stool, looked at her, and clapped his hands. His face beamed with delight.

"That is excellent," he said; "you never did better! You are a great singer. It is in you."

He rose and, coming over to where she stood, placed his hands on her shoulders caressingly.

"God has given you a grand voice, and the artist's temperament. Will you be true to your talents? If you love your art and remain steadfast to it you will be

a contented woman. But if you are false to it you will suffer. Do you not comprehend this, my dear child? Art is a jealous mistress. You belong to her, she will not brook defection. Do not yield to anybody or anything that will try to take you from music. Work, study, be patient, be faithful, and in the end you will have success, fruition, happiness. Remember what I say."

The dream ended. She awoke with a start. The gas-jets still flared, but through the window came the rosy light of dawn. The night was gone.

She lay back among the silken pillows of the lounge, and thought of the dream, and what she had done with her talents and her life.

An hour passed.

There was a knock at her door. She jumped up, trembling. At last her husband had come—or Lelia! There would be explanations, and everything would be made clear and straight again.

She smiled, as she bade the person enter, for relief was at hand.

The door opened. She saw the butler, who was graver and more sacerdotal than ever in the blush tints of early morning.

"What is it? Are your master and Mrs. Aus der Schlogl back?"

"No, ma'am. A gentleman has called, and will not be denied seeing you."

"A gentleman!"

"Yes. Here is his card."

"There must be some mistake."

"He asked for you. He says he will wait if you

are not up or ready to receive him. He will not leave the house without seeing you. The business is urgent."

She took the card and read the name thereon.

"I do not know him."

"I knew you were up, so I ventured to disturb you. I have been waiting all night for Mr. Duncan myself."

"Where is the gentleman?"

"In the library."

"Say I will see him at once."

She gave Whitacre time to deliver the message, and then went directly to the library.

"You are Mr. Prescott?" she said, with a glance at the card she held; "I am Mrs. Duncan."

She looked at him keenly, but she had never seen him before.

"I am a stranger to you," Mr. Prescott said; "I should not have intruded upon you if my business was not imperative."

"Yes," she said; "what is it?"

"Have you seen a newspaper this morning?"

"No."

"Then I must tell you!" he exclaimed, blankly.

"Tell me what?" she asked; "something has happened. You have come to break it to me. What is it? Has anything happened to my husband?"

He saw that he must speak, and being merciful gave his bad news at once.

"Your husband is dead," he said, as calmly as he could; "and I have brought you the papers that were found on his person."

She looked at him dazed. She did not understand the statement but partially for the moment. Suddenly

an alarmed expression flashed across her face.

"Mr. Duncan is dead!" she said, in a lowered voice; "did he commit—suicide?"

"Oh, no."

"He did not commit suicide. His was a natural death. Thank God for that!"

She tottered, and fell. She had fainted.

In her darkened bedroom she lay prone on the bed. Outside, the winter world laughed on in its holiday jollity. The incessant chirping of the sparrows in the square, the gleam of the cold sunshine, and the city's eternal song caused the stricken woman inexpressible torture. She wanted to stretch out her hand and still the vivacious hubbub.

In moving from side to side she touched some papers beside her on the bed. There were several letters of her husband's among them one of Lelia's, a wallet, and a morning journal.

She picked up the latter, and sitting up, read about his sudden death in a street at Yonkers.

And then she took up the letters. Anything was preferable to thinking of that awful death. She read Lelia's first. It was addressed to Don, and it seemed to reveal an understanding or engagement between them, and gave the fact that a marriage between him and a young girl of Yonkers had recently been arranged, or rumored rather, as most likely to occur at no distant date, to which the writer objected.

The letter explained Duncan's presence in Yonkers. He had gone there to obtain satisfaction from this man —it might have been to break off this prospective marriage, and to compel him to marry Lelia. His strange

words and conduct during the last interview with herself were but the natural results of this state of affairs. The woman had confessed to her brother, and he believed that Don had divulged the secret to her. Such was the view Grace took of the situation; any other did not present itself, and she always thought this the true one. She took the letter and enclosed it in an envelope, which she directed to Lelia. She rang her bell.

"Has Mrs. Aus der Schlogl returned?" she asked of the maid, who answered the summons.

"No, ma'am."

"Have this letter delivered to her at once. You will find her at Mrs. Grey's. You must put it into her own hands yourself, and say that I sent it. There will be no answer."

XXIII

Immediately after the settlement of her husband's business affairs Grace left America. She went to Europe to carry out at last her dear, old Herr Professor's plans, and to be true to that talent which God had given her, thereby retrieving the mistake she had made with her life.

Eventually she became one of the famous singers of the day. Her triumphs, however, were confined to the capitals of the old world. She would not sing in America.

The people she once knew drifted gradually out of her life. Her step-mother and sister were not in sympathy with her public career, regarding that a degradation. They maintained merely a formal relationship with her. They were satisfied, and richly placed in the world they loved, and she was not necessary to them.

As for the others she had known, they did not cross her path again. No doubt they frequently enjoyed the privilege of hearing her sing on the European stage, for she was too renowned a singer to be passed by, and in these days everybody visits the old world nearly every year.

And was Grace happy? Contented, and busy, and useful in her chosen sphere, yes; but as to being happy—

Well, happiness is one of those broad, deep words, rich with subtle significance, which frequently means more than most mortals ever know.

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